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THE DRAGON AND ME

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY
AND SHAMANISM

A FRAMEWORK OF BELIEF IN
PARANORMAL EXPERIENCES
AND ITS RELATION TO
POSITIVE/NEGATIVE
SCHIZOTYPY

THE SUPERNATURAL
WORLD IN MORMON
HISTORY AND FOLKLORE

Paranthropology

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Introduction

Jack Hunter



Welcome to *Paranthropology* Vol. 6 No. 1, the first issue of 2015. First things first, the *Paranthropology* fourth anniversary anthology is almost ready for publication. This book will be the first in a new series of books published under the imprint title 'Psychoid Books,' which is set to include a range of edited volumes and monographs that fall under the broad label of 'Paranthropology.' More information will be available about this shortly, but in the meantime keep your eyes peeled for developments.

In this edition of the journal Susan Greenwood describes her experiences with the dragon, and explores what such experiences reveal about the paranormal more generally. This paper was originally presented at the Esalen Institute conference on 'Anthropology and the Paranormal' in October 2013. Then, Alejandro Parra presents research on the connections between paranormal beliefs and positive and negative schizotypy, before Stanley Krippner explores the overlap between shamanic and parapsychological research. In 'Capturing Spirituality,'

Matt Coward employs an interview technique known as 'photo-elicitation' to discover more about the beliefs of contemporary Neo-Pagans, before S. Alexander Hardison surveys research on the types and dynamics of apparitional experiences. Finally, John W. Morehead presents an interview with W. Paul Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen, editors of the recently published book *Between Pulpit and Pew*, which examines the role of the paranormal in Mormon folklore traditions.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this eclectic issue of *Paranthropology*.

Jack Hunter (Editor)

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The Dragon and Me: Anthropology and the Paranormal

Susan Greenwood



As an introduction to this Symposium,¹ I would like to outline some of my anthropological research on aspects of magic that comes under the rubric of anomalous or paranormal experience. Rather than the more usual inquiry of how and why people believe in seemingly irrational or bizarre magical practices, over the years I have addressed the issue of the examination of magic more directly. This approach initially developed out of a personal interest and involvement in witchcraft as a form of pagan spirituality. By becoming involved in magical experience firstly as a practitioner and then later as an anthropologist studying magic, I discovered that by engaging with seemingly random magical feeling states that they had an emotional and sensory presence. In addition, rather than being odd or rather bizarre single events these affective states formed patterns of

synchronous meanings that came to have deep relevance to me. I developed the term *magical consciousness* to describe the mode of awareness that predominated during these occurrences. A diffuse and associative mode of mind, magical consciousness is characterized by a sense of permeability of boundaries between material and non-material perceptions of reality. The use of this notion describes a general sense of expansive conceptual fluidity that not only replaces all notions of fixed categories between phenomena, but also features the principle of non-contradiction², the existence of apparent mutually incompatible and exclusive states: such as 'life in death' and 'unity and multiplicity of being'.

My encounter with a non-material dimension of reality challenges more conventional anthropological work in terms of the issues it raises concerning the anthropologist's first hand involvement with altered

¹ Introductory paper prepared for a Symposium on The Anthropology of the Paranormal, The Center for Theory and Research, Esalen Institute, California, October 13-18th 2013.

² A feature of human thought first reported by Aristotle, but also noted by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in his work on 'primitive mentality' in *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl*, Peter Riviere, trans., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975; see Bradd Shore *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture and the Problem of Meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998: 27, 313-4; and Susan Greenwood *The Anthropology of Magic*. Oxford: Berg, 2009: 30-43.

states of consciousness, and also, of course, the reality of spirits. Choosing not to look primarily at the rationality of magic, or the instrumentality of such thought, my research has concentrated on the examination of the dynamic *process* of magical thinking that my experience has revealed. By trying to bridge the gap between supposedly rational and irrational perceptions of the world I have tried to make magic as an aspect of consciousness more understandable. In this paper I shall outline how my examination of magic as an aspect of consciousness happened, and try to sum up how I have come to see anomalous experiences as not strange phenomena *per se*, but as part of a magical process of lived 'beingness' that changes the way we see and come to understand the world.

My increasing involvement with what I now describe as magical consciousness was slow. In academic terms, it started with my doctoral research, later published as *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld* in 2000. Here I sought to create communication between scholarly analysis and the magical spirit panoramas of my informants who were initially British witches and ceremonial magicians. An ultimate objective in my work was to examine encounters with 'the otherworld', a non-material anomalous reality that was difficult to articulate using conventional social science frameworks that tended toward reductive materialistic ex-

planations. Wanting to develop the critical eye of the anthropologist, but also an empathy that was sensitive to my informants' involvement with this inspired magical otherworld, I took a deliberately participatory approach, and this forged the way for my later work. Arguing that anthropological engagement with the experience of magic was essential for its further understanding, I considered such data a valuable component of research, not to be contrasted with scientific truth, or seen to threaten objectivity. A reviewer for this book, described me as a 'native turned anthropologist'. Rather than focusing on the 'other', I had turned an anthropological gaze upon myself as a native. If magical consciousness was a human faculty of mind then I did not see why I should not examine my own experience, and so, in anthropological terms, I did become a native, although I would later argue that we are all potentially natives of this mode of thought.

By going deeper into a native's account of magic through the lived experience of the anthropologist's life, I attempted to demonstrate the development of the process of magical consciousness. Although the detail of my increasing involvement was specific, the actual process is common to magical thinking, and can be applied to cross-cultural analysis to understand what appears to be a ubiquitous human experience, in one form or another. Magical consciousness is, at one and the same time, intensely personal, as it is universal. Despite varying and sometimes enormous cultural

differences, there are close similarities in the ways that people engage with the experience of magic as feeling states – from shamanism in Amazonia to the recent revival of witchcraft as a form of western spirituality, but also in more everyday contexts as a more mundane part of life. Moving into a more expanded conceptual space that incorporates all of life, including emotions and dimensions of spirit, my hope has been to open up a different perception of magic.

In subsequent works I developed this approach. For example, in *The Nature of Magic* (2005), a study of how western pagans viewed and related to nature, I took this position one step further to include more of my own experience of magic. I also searched for theories that could help me explain magical consciousness as a language for communication with beings of otherness. I started with Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's notion of *participation*, a social psychological perception of the world based on a mystical mentality, the emotional association between persons and things in contact with a non-ordinary spirit reality³. An early example of this participatory attitude that I recall is an occasion when a friend and I were talking about magic as we walked by a stream that flows into a river close to her cottage in the Brecon Beacons, one of the sources of the river Taff in Wales. I was some way into my research on magi-

cal consciousness at the time and was trying to explain to her what I meant by the term. As we reached a few trees by the side of the stream, I stopped to look at the beautiful reflection that the tree branches and the sky made in the water – at that moment the depths of the water, with its little rushing eddies over the stones of the river bed, combined with the sun and the white clouds in the blue summer sky. All formed part of a pattern of participation – the sky was mirrored in the water and they intermingled. My friend threw a stick into the stream for her dog to fetch and instantly the pattern broke into a myriad of shimmering fragments. Ripples formed from the point where the stick hit the water and gradually spread out forming another pattern until the waters regained their own momentum and the reflections of the clouds re-appeared in the river. Watching the movement of the ripples on water, I realized that I could explain what I meant by magical consciousness in this moment of the participation of tree, sky, water, river bed, sun, the ripples, my friend, the dog, the stick and all the feelings and connections that this myriad of kaleidoscope associations made in and through time.

Coming to comprehend these associative connections, I gradually came to discover more about the process that was occurring through my own experiences. Indeed, it was while I was participating in

³ Quoted in Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991: 91; Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl*, Peter Riviere, trans., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975.

fieldwork for *The Nature of Magic* that I realized that I was having a strong emotional connection with nature, and also that I was being able to sense a non-material quality or feeling of spirit. As time went on - as I was trying to express the feelings with a more analytical approach as well as a direct experiential immersion - it felt imperative to name the sensations that were occurring. As a form of shorthand, I came to consider these collective experiences as 'the dragon', and I devised ways of their further unraveling. Initially the dragon was a feeling that started with a sense of awe in nature; it was not simply a symbol, or a metaphor, or a recognizable material artefact. Nor did it represent a literal understanding of some monstrous beast, although I was to find out that it did have hugely monstrously terrifying qualities. Rather it was a nuanced opening up of perception that led to my further investigation.

As my research progressed, my initial feeling of the dragon as a force of nature came to be more shaped by the views of my research informants. Pagans generally refer to the dragon as an underground dwelling winged serpent symbolic of the elements earth, air, fire, and water, as well as spirit. In many contemporary European cultures, a dragon is considered to be a manifestation of evil, being vanquished by a hero in the shape of Saint George, but for pagans the dragon is most often a positive life force that has been repressed by Christianity. In this sense, the dragon is more akin to the Chinese and Japanese portrayals that have

a multiplicity of forms, sometimes with a horse's head and a snake's tail, or a camel's head with stag's horns and the eyes of a demon; alternatively, it might have the neck of a snake, belly of a clam, carp scales, eagle claws, soles of a tiger, and the ears of a cow. The dragon is a participatory being - it resides in relationships between one thing and another. Chameleon-like, the dragon changes from creature to creature transmuting into many things - for me it is a raw primal participatory force of nature running through all. The multifarious nature of the dragon seemed to represent well the complex of emotions and sensory experiences that I was having. Being drawn to the Australian aboriginal mythological idea of time as an ancestral serpent that linked all life through its breath, I came to feel the dragon as a being of many manifestations and possibilities that could move through time and space. To experience this ancestral being, I felt that it was imperative to be able to dream, to enter the equivalent of a mythological dreamtime.

My exploratory question towards this experience was, in the words of William Blake's poem *Tyger Tyger*, 'In what distant deeps or skies/ Burnt the fire of thine eyes?' The dragon represented a feeling state, a participatory association that would guide my research into what seemed like distant deeps and skies of the imaginative and synchronous worlds of magic. The dragon entity had been lurking in my subconscious since childhood, but it was only when I came to deliberately examine the process of

magical thought that it seemed to make itself manifest. It appeared that my awareness of this entity emerged gradually, much as a tendril of dragon smoke. The more I became involved in thinking about the connections and associations of magical thinking, the more I knew that I recognized magical worldviews from much earlier in my life. Beginning to see another dimension to my academic work, one that was becoming increasingly hard to write about, I came to the awareness that I was making all sorts of synchronous connections that seemed to be telling their own story.

In time, my exploration of my 'data' on the dragon led me to write about the encounter as a narrative. I was heartened to read that fieldwork itself is considered to be a narrative by some anthropologists whereby the anthropologist seeks intimate knowledge behind the scenes, behind the masks and roles, behind the generalities and abstractions; and the anthropologist's task involves finding some convincing ethnographic access to this narrative⁴. I decided that I would acknowledge my own emotions, intuition, and imagination to include all subjective features of the mind participating in magical consciousness in my own narrative. It was only through coming to feel the pattern that the dragon had made in my life, unbeknown to me at the time, that I could develop the idea of using

the material for further examination in my research. I wanted to show how I had come to understand the dragon as a source of another perspective, one long obscured through the valorisation of reason and rationality that had exploded into widespread cultural awareness during the Enlightenment.

And so I decided I would experience what happened to me through association with the dragon as part of my research into magic as a wider conception of consciousness. In essence, the dragon had a physical reality through my body and actions in the world⁵. Of course, I did not physically become a dragon that somehow I manifested into a fire-breathing monster - but nevertheless the dragon had a form of corporeal as well as imaginal reality. I experienced it as a dance of synchronous interaction, among other things. This is what shaped what I have come to understand as the dragon, that aspect of us that remains forever connected and capable of transformation within a wider nature. The dragon has led me through an anthropological and magical process in which I have attempted to discover and narrate links of communication between seemingly incongruent domains: on the one hand lies the non-material dimension of spirit; and on the other anthropological theories largely rooted in a material world that is suspi-

⁴ Anthony P. Cohen and Nigel Rapport 'Introduction' to *Questions of Consciousness* ASA Monographs 33. Anthony P. Cohen and Nigel Rapport (eds.) London: Routledge, 1995: 7-9.

⁵ My first exploration of writing about this will appear in *The Social Life of Spirits*, Diana Espirito Santo and Ruy Blanes (eds.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014: 6-7, 12.

cious, if not in many cases openly hostile, to my approach.

At the beginning of my doctoral research on magic I had been largely unaware of the dragon as a shaping force in my life, but gradually, as I got more involved with studying and writing about magic, I began to link one thing with another and started having anomalous experiences, ones that I would later put together as meaningful to my dragon narrative. The more I became involved in thinking magically about the dragon, the more I recalled what at the time seemed like odd experiences. An early memory from around the time of my undergraduate studies in anthropology was of standing in a long queue to pay at the checkout in a multi-national chain store. It seemed to take forever to be served. As I was waiting, I recalled that I studied idly the advertising display in front of me. And then something in my mind seemed to shift. Looking through the display, I sensed that I was going back in time. Looking upwards, I noticed the old elaborate plaster coving on the ceiling of the shop, a remnant from a bygone age. The decorative plaster had only been partly concealed by the advertisement and it was still possible to see the original ceiling of the building. Different feelings came flooding into my mind – I felt like I was in several places at once and in varying realities. I seemed to be able to feel through time. It was a strange

moment as my ears gently buzzed and my awareness expanded into a wider consciousness. The experience made me reflect on that moment in the busy shopping centre amid the comings and goings of many people going about their everyday business. I wanted to go deeper beyond the superficiality of the ‘buy, buy, buy’ materialistic culture to find something more intricate that was somehow being obscured, to get to something deeper and more meaningful.

Afterwards I interpreted the experience as the dragon awareness arising from my sub-consciousness, behind and beyond ordinary perception. It felt to me as if this memory was the dragon of the intuitive mind communicating. It seemed that the dragon was leading me into another mode of being, one that went deeper than the superficiality of the advertisements that offered happiness through more and more consumption. The dragon was not to be found in consumerist culture, rather it was sensed in the hidden spaces in between. The dragon spoke to me in small moments of stillness and reflection, and in dreams, hopes and fears that gradually I came to interpret as having meaning. I had to learn to listen to the dragon’s voice. I needed to hear the dragon speak from its so-far silent realm, to tell its story.

One dream seemed particularly significant. In the dream a friend handed me a basket that another friend had given me. I took the basket and removed the embroidered flowery lid; a white snake rapidly unwound itself from inside the basket and

sprang out upon me. It fastened its fangs into my arm... I awoke feeling that it was a very profound experience. Being bitten by a white snake in the dream seemed like a form of initiation to me. I did not know what the experience meant then, but more recently I came to realize that it was a stirring of the dragon as a sort of elemental awakening. Figuring out what the dream could mean took me back to memories of my childhood. I had kept grass snakes as pets and was captivated by their beautiful smooth zig-zagged patterned bodies, and their abilities to glide across the ground and swim through water. I loved letting them slide over my arms and legs as I watched their black forked tongues flicking neatly in and out as they smelt the air. I was also fascinated by earthworms and spent time playing in the wild and over-grown end of the garden. Uncovered all year, the sand pit became the home of all sorts of wildlife: from millipedes and woodlice to wriggly ginger wireworms, but most especially for earthworms. I watched how they changed shape by contracting and then extending their bodies, and how they gradually transformed the sand and the earth in the sand pit.

Snakes and worms share some of the dragon's qualities of transformation: snakes shed their skins representing cosmic renewal and rebirth following death; worms transform the earth. I later learned that it was Charles Darwin who had written that the differences in mind between humans and higher animals was one of degree not

of kind. Darwin changed many people's perceptions of these seemingly lowly creatures noting how worms are better at tilling the soil than us; they swallow the earth ejecting what they do not need for nutrient in a fine tilth that cannot be matched by human ploughing. I came to think that there was no radical separation between humans and other animals, and that humans were not superior to all other beings, as I had been taught. Later, I thought that the passing of the snake basket between my friends represented a form of communication. Much like music communicates on many different levels of feeling, this dream seemed to be conveying the early associations of the dragon. What was it about worms, snakes and dragons, I wondered, that stirred the human imagination? This question would lie in my subconscious for quite a time as I completed teaching various courses, particularly the anthropology of religion and the anthropology of the body for Goldsmiths, University of London, and also courses on shamanic consciousness and altered states of consciousness for the University of Sussex. All of these helped me to refine and develop my theoretical grasp of the dragon.

In the meantime, after the completion of my earlier books, my publishers suggested that I write a textbook on magic, and so the dragon had to lie mostly dormant for a time. Writing *The Anthropology of Magic*, published in 2009, allowed me to develop my theoretical ideas on magical consciousness as an aspect of awareness that could

potentially be experienced by anyone. Expressed in a myriad of varying situations and social contexts, informing cosmological realities as well as individual behavior, I described magical consciousness as fully a part of human life, even if it had been devalued, suppressed and driven underground so that it manifested in unexpected forms, especially in western contexts. I also wrote that magical consciousness was an aspect of mind that occurred in a multiplicity of ways in varying individuals, cultural contexts, and through time, but I was aware that adopting such a position could be challenging. Anthropologists have preferred to focus on cultural particulars rather than operating at such micro-levels as human consciousness. Noting that such particulars were a vital and valuable aspect of the discipline, my focus in this book was also on the universal, a monistic orientation towards what connects rather than what divides us as human beings:

Including the larger picture has the advantage of breaking down old divisions between ‘the west’ and ‘the other’. By bringing these two categories of understanding together we bring our shared humanity into perspective and this is important and relevant to today’s globalizing world, as well as the evolving relevance of anthropology. Concentrating on similarities rather than differences be-

tween people can break down social divisions and encourage communication between disparate groups. Magic is a topic that has to be understood and explained on both micro (individual experience) and macro (universal) levels. The positive value of this approach is that it makes us look at ourselves, as well as others; it brings us together, and makes connections between phenomena that perhaps at first sight do not seem to be connected⁶.

My task was to explore deeper into my individual experience of magic to see how the process of magical thinking unfolded within a person’s conception of an inspired and connected reality. I hoped that this would shed light on more indigenous cultures that had on-going relationships with spirit worlds. It seemed especially important that I should do this to demonstrate that magical consciousness was indeed potentially inherent within the human psyche. At this point, I decided to accept various invitations to talk about magical consciousness. To this end, I am greatly indebted to the Danish Ethnographic Society to be able to give their keynote lecture on magical consciousness to the Anthropologist Society Annual Meeting, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, in November 2007, and to lead a ‘Limits of Reason’ Anthropological Research Group Seminar on Magic, also at the University of Copenhagen, two days

⁶ *The Anthropology of Magic* Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009: 4-5.

later. I gave a paper on 'Magical healing' at the Rituals of Healing Conference, Faculty of Health Sciences, Nord-Trondelag University College, Norway in May 2008; a keynote lecture on magical consciousness to the NORDIC Network for Amerindian Studies, 'Rethinking Shamanism: Perceptions of Body and Soul in Multidimensional Environments' Research Seminar, Kastrup, Denmark in May 2010; and led a research seminar on magic as a form of knowledge to the Cambridge Centre for Western Esotericism, Girton College, Cambridge University, England, in May 2010; and finally a seminar on magical consciousness and science to the Body, Health and Religion Society Seminar, University of Cardiff, Wales, in April 2011. Giving these lectures and leading seminars offered the chance for much important feedback that helped to further develop my thinking on magical consciousness.

After *The Anthropology of Magic* was completed, the time was right to go deeper into an examination of the process of magical consciousness by reconnecting with the dragon once more. Deciding to open myself up to the experience of the dragon, my objective in academic terms was to further research on a participatory aspect of human cognition as it melds with the non-human and non-material. As my awareness of the dragon gradually increased, this spirit being seemed to come through me as a dis-

ting presence. Eventually I started to grasp its fuller significance. Subsequently, I came to understand the dragon as an entity that was simultaneously of me and not of me. I wanted to explore the possibility that this non-material being had decided to work through me, for whatever reason. It was only through coming to understand the pattern that the dragon had made in my life that I could really develop the concept of magical consciousness. In so doing, I discovered that it was methodologically important to pay attention to moments that might be overlooked during more conventional fieldwork, and develop a sensitivity to subtleties for working with such entities. By temporarily holding in abeyance my analytical, classifying mind for the duration of the interaction I could start to make sense of this communication. As to why the dragon had shown itself to me, I could only guess. Perhaps it was due to my rather solitary childhood whereby I had formed close attachments to nature rather than any organized religious affiliation, or maybe because as an anthropologist I was working with altered states of consciousness and was open to this sort of otherworldly mediation, or even because some people are more sensitive to spiritual communication from non-material realms than others, at this stage I could only speculate.

Over time, I had become increasingly keen to try to explain encounters with a non-material reality that were difficult to articulate using more conventional anthropological methodological and theoretical

frameworks. Deciding that for the present I had gone as far as I was able in an academic mode, I thought I would write about my life as an anthropologist studying magic. I chose to use my own experience, or so I thought at the time. On reflection, I think that it was not so much my decision as that of the dragon. And so I went with the possibility that this entity had decided to work through me, for whatever reason, to put across a certain message. As to what that message might be I was unsure, but I decided to trust the process as long as it coincided with my sense of integrity. I entertained the possibility that entities, such as the dragon, could be searching for appropriate 'vehicles' to communicate certain information. It had long been my impression that otherworldly entities manifested in a variety of forms to communicate with anyone willing. Rather than becoming distracted by such questions, I decided to leave them until later in my fieldwork trusting that the reasons for my developing relationship with the dragon would eventually become clear. What I did not realize then was that I was being used by the non-material entity that I had come to recognize as the dragon. It slowly dawned on me that I was not in total control of my writing. I did have some inkling that this was the case - I knew that the book was being written whilst I was in a participatory state of altered awareness.

Eventually, I started writing thoughts and meditations down in the format of a book. In the physical production of words -

on the computer screen and in my body-mind through meditation - these themes became woven into the story of my life. As I wrote, they seemed to take on a life of their own through a stream of consciousness, a type of intimate recording of the everyday minute of life made popular by Virginia Woolf, especially in her novel *Mrs Dalloway*. This mode of writing, so different to the formal academic style, seemed to reach different parts of my awareness and my memory. I did not want to write objectively as this would destroy the subjective experience of magic, which I slowly came to realize was central to its understanding. A pressing question was how to write about my own experience of the dragon. My reflexive approach to fieldwork had a big impact on my writing, presenting me with a challenge. I had recorded in the introduction to *The Nature of Magic* that Virginia Woolf had once written that the main thing in beginning a novel was not to feel that you could write it, but that it existed on the far side of a gulf that words could not cross. This was a little how I felt about writing about magical consciousness. It existed 'out there', but I also knew that it connected with something deep within too.

After sharing experiences with many other practitioners of magic I knew that magical consciousness existed intuitively I had known about this as a child but trying to put it into words was like crossing a chasm or an abyss to bring the meaning through, and then only incompletely. The problem was how to express the inex-

pressible, or what psychologist William James famously termed ‘the ineffable’. Woolf thought that the novel had to be ‘pulled through in breathless anguish’, but when I was writing that book – during one seemingly mad summer – it felt not as though I was pulling it through but that it was creating itself through me. Surely, I wrote at the time, no one admits to writing anthropological fieldwork in this way, this approach is much too subjective⁷. Woolf had said that words are full of echoes and associations, stored with meanings and memories. She sought to create change through words, seeing them as being created anew through being out and about in streets, fields and everyday life in a will o’ the wisp form of a stream of consciousness. This seemed to resonate with my experience of the dragon. I also sought to create change, a change in attitude, that allows a more open approach to the social scientific study of magic in all its dimensions – social, political, psychological and also incorporating a non-material and ecological aspect.

My relationship with the dragon was a communication with an imaginal spirit entity. Of course, this raised the anthropological dilemma of a belief in spirits: they might exist in people’s imagination, but not in reality in academia. I found that developing the concept of magical consciousness could overcome the difficulty. I had realized from my previous work, that when a person is

experiencing magical consciousness it makes no difference whether they believe in spirits, or not. It does not matter how the experience is labeled, it is the experience itself that is important. It matters not a jot if spirit communications are categorized as psychological – if they are explained as a part of a person’s own internal thought processes – or whether the non-material entities communicated with are considered to be independent with a spirit being and existence of their own. Whilst participating in a magical aspect of consciousness the question of belief is irrelevant: ‘belief’ is not a necessary condition to communicate with an inspirited world⁸. How this communication is viewed by the person themselves, and their culture, is another matter of course. For my work however, questions of belief or the reality or non-reality of spirits, while interesting themselves, are a ‘straightjacket’ for an alternative perception afforded by communication with non-material entities. The issue for me is one of a different perception.

During an experience of magical consciousness it feels like spirits share a degree of corporeal materiality and possess mind. I reasoned that the minds of entities – in whatever form – and ours could meet in a wider consciousness. Of course we know that this was a view common before Descartes. Aristotle, for example, thought the soul was equivalent to psyche – it was the

⁷ *The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005: xii.

⁸ *The Anthropology of Magic*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009: 140

principle of life that animates. This view was one that Blake tried to re-invoke as the cusp of the scientific revolution. Harking back to the earlier view, Blake envisioned a world in which every creature was an inspirited person living within the total freedom of its Imagination⁹. I reminded myself time and time again that the view that all of life is infused with spirit, soul and consciousness was common in the ancient world prior to the dawning development of the rationalizing scientific worldview of Blake's time. The period from the seventeenth-century to the present in the western world seemed to me as just a 'blip in time' and one that could be transformed again - not back to some so-called Golden Age, but as a paradigm change in broader consciousness and awareness.

Thinking about such an integrated perspective I was drawn to the work of Gregory Bateson, particularly in his book *Mind and Nature: a necessary unity* (1985). Bateson, of course, is particularly relevant to being at Esalen, and I would like to think that in some way I could build on his thinking of how to try and understand an integrated world. Seeking to find a language of relationship with which to communicate, Bateson thought that logic was not suitable for the description of biological patterns, and so he turned to metaphor as the language of nature. I found that Tim Ingold's work in *Perceptions of the Environment* (2000) took a similar position to Bateson's by adopting a

world-view envisaged from within a total field of relations whose unfolding is tantamount to the process of life itself. Both Bateson and Ingold see the mind as immanent in the whole system of the organism-environment and I gained inspiration from this perspective. My aim was to try and understand body-mind through a process of interconnection with the inspirited imagination of magical consciousness within such a total field of organism-environment relations. In the meantime, my experiences with the dragon were progressing.

By concentrating on my own experience with the dragon I found that I could understand the process of thinking that underpins the workings of magical consciousness. A similar underlying system of associative thought can be understood in many different contexts: the method is similar; it is the context that makes up the wide variety of varying experience. The universal can accommodate the uniquely personal and individual and this is symbolised through the dragon. It became clear to me that the dragon is not necessarily a fixed entity conceptualized simply through symbols, metaphor or other material manifestations, it can arise spontaneously from a feeling of intercommunication and association, one sometimes difficult to put into words. It did seem as if the dragon had some sort of archetypal presence, a psychic collective representation not fully available to my conscious elaboration. Deciding to write using

⁹ Kathleen Raine *Golgonooza: city of Imagination*, Ipswich, Suffolk: Golgonooza Press, 1991: 11-12.

poetry and a stream of consciousness style to 'bracket' my analytical thinking, I tried to access the participatory and synchronous language of magic working through the themes the dragon had conveyed to me. The first draft of my proposed book on the dragon was largely incomprehensible, and on the recommendation of two stalwart people who had offered to read it, I added more explanation and details that made it more accessible when I had achieved more distance from the immediate process of writing. It was shortly after this point that Erik D. Goodwyn, a psychiatrist and author of *The Neurobiology of the Gods*¹⁰, and I made contact. The possibility of a collaborative interdisciplinary project was broached, and I suggested the idea of co-authorship on my dragon material. Our book *Magical Consciousness: an anthropological and neurobiological approach* (Routledge 2015) develops an interdisciplinary analysis of magical consciousness utilizing my dragon narrative material.

My narrative of the dragon is the form in which I have experienced and organized my

experience. Sometimes, it seemed, that the knowledge that I sought was encapsulated in memories, both within myself and within the natural world. In narrative particular images are recollected, abstracted from memory's stream: memory recalls the past to the present¹¹. Narratives as stories are patterns of connectedness that have meaning¹². And so my narrative became, in Bateson's terms, a little knot of connectedness that had relevance. Memory re-orders the past and the present through a synchrony, the imaginative and intuitive association of specific meaningful memories creates a pattern. The task then was to interpret the pattern of meaning in terms of what the dragon was communicating. As an anthropologist researching magical thinking, I came to understand how magical meaning was relational and depended on selection, combination, and context. Like every other undergraduate anthropology student, I had learned about Evans-Pritchard's classic account of the Azande collapsing granary, as an example of synchrony, but it was Jung's use of the concept of synchrony - to refer to a non-causal connecting principle when powerful psychic components are activated - that interested me. In particular, it was

¹⁰ *The Neurobiology of the Gods: How Brain Physiology Shapes the Recurrent Imagery of Myth and Dreams*, London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

¹¹ Anthony P. Cohen and Nigel Rapport 'Introduction' to *Questions of Consciousness* ASA Monographs 33. Anthony P. Cohen and Nigel Rapport (eds.) London: Routledge, 1995: 7-9.

¹² Gregory Bateson *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* New York: Bantam, 1988.

Jung's observation¹³ that the ancient Chinese mind 'contemplates the cosmos like a modern physicist, as a psychophysical structure' in which synchronicity refers to an interdependence of objective events and includes the subjective states of the observer¹⁴. Here then was a link between objectivity and subjectivity - one so fraught in the natural and social sciences - that I needed to engage with the dragon.

The fiery mythological dragon, with 'burning eyes' like Blake's Tyger, became a specific story of synchronistic connections to describe my academic exploration into magical and analytical thinking. I therefore came to understand the dragon through Jung's notion of synchronicity whereby relationships are based on events from material and non-material dimensions coming together in a meaningful but causally unrelated way. The dragon was the space between, the space within that incorporates exploration into areas reminiscent of Blake's 'distant deeps and skies' in a manner that is meaningful, and also full of creativity and imagination. The notion of synchronicity does not threaten anthropological analysis or causality, but enhances it by revealing the different *modus operandi* of magical consciousness; it was through understanding the concept of synchronicity that I would discover my relationship with

the dragon. I found that writing about the dragon released the tensions between the different modes of thought so that the magical/mythopoetic *and* the analytical/critical could be compared and explored. A whole new field of 'intimate knowledge behind the scenes' could be opened up. During magical consciousness, I have found that meaning is relational and depends on selection, combination, and context. In this respect, I came to be very inspired by Blake's work; it seemed to take me back to a place of child-like innocence, one that I intuitively recognized. My exploration into the dragon's distant deeps or skies to find the burning of its eyes took me into a participatory feeling state within my imagination.

A transformative being, the dragon lives within the reality of the mythological imagination, and, as we know, has done so for millennia among different peoples and varying cultures. There must be something about the dragon that stirs our human memory. Initially however, I did not have a strong sense of a being that I could identify as a dragon. As already mentioned, my solitary childhood had led me to form close attachments to nature and it was perhaps this that led me to becoming more sensitised to magical consciousness¹⁵. In time, the dragon came to symbolize my particular

¹³ In the *I Ching*, the Richard Wilhem translation, London: Penguin Arkana, 1989, xxiii.

¹⁴ Anthony Stevens, *On Jung*, London: Penguin, 1991: xxiv.

¹⁵ See Susan Greenwood 'Toward an Epistemology of Imaginal Alterity: fieldwork with the dragon' in *The Social Life of Spirits*, Diana Espirito Santo and Ruy Llera Blanes (eds.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

‘little knot’ of connected relevance. Looking back to my childhood now I can see connections of magical thinking, I did see the world as ‘alive’: my stuffed toy rabbit was real, as was my china horse, toy elephant, and the small plastic boy through whom I lived my adventures. We all lived in another country under the white flower-painted chest of drawers in my bedroom. Eventually memories of a specific dragon did start coming back and I remembered that, like most young children of my generation, I would sing a popular tune called *Puff the Magic Dragon*. The lyrics of the song, which were based on a poem written by Lennie Lipton and sung by Peter, Paul, and Mary, told of an exciting magical dragon who lived by the sea and who made friends with a little boy called Jackie Paper. Together they travelled in a boat with a billowed sail and Jackie ‘kept a look-out perched on Puff’s gigantic tail’. One day, in the lyrics of the *Puff* song, Jackie fails to come to play with Puff, ‘A dragon lives forever but not so little boys, painted wings and giant rings make way for other toys’. When Jackie does not arrive, the dragon ‘ceased his fearless roar’; his head was bent in sorrow, his green scales fell like rain, and he retreated back into his cave. The dragon loses Jackie when the little boy grows up, but somehow the dragon and its magical world never completely left me. Rather it lay dormant until the right time when I would realize the participatory and synchronous connection.

A view of the relationship between all beings came to shape my thoughts, but how to access it? It seemed to lie deeper than everyday superficial reality, and so I sought to find it. Many of the practitioners of magic that I worked with at the time used the rhythm of a drumbeat to send themselves into a trance for visualisations. I had bought a drum so that I could participate in rituals and other events and experiences but also observe what was happening at the same time. I joined a drumming group in London and every month around twelve people met to share experiences of shamanic journeying. This involved lying down on the floor while one member beat a drum for about fifteen to twenty minutes. During this time they used the active imagination to propel themselves into magical consciousness. These were my first experiences of using a drum to induce altered states of consciousness, and they would lead to my first direct practical contact with a feeling that I first consciously attributed to ‘the dragon’ as a ‘research informant’. I was living in a small fisherman’s cottage, in a village on the harbour at Wells-next-the Sea in Norfolk, East Anglia. I had bought a drum some time previously but had not used it. The drum had hung on my bedroom wall for a long time waiting to be painted. I kept staring at it thinking that one day I would get around to it, but time came and went. And then something happened. Suddenly I got a feeling that the drum needed to be painted and it needed to be painted soon... Not analysing this

feeling of immediacy, I sat on the floor in the cottage with all the paints surrounding me, as I noted in my field report:

I felt a deep presence of a dragon; it was a pulsating feeling that seemed to be coming from the base of my spine. The presence slowly took over as I squeezed some red and yellow paint onto a saucer. Picking up the paintbrush, I mixed the colours together with water, making sure that there were lots of streaks of both colours still in the paint, this seemed important to keep the elements separate. As the first strokes of paint met the drum it seemed to sing in response. The blood-red paint with yellow streaks, the drum, and my whole being seemed to come into alignment; it was almost like placing the last piece of a jigsaw puzzle into position when the subtle shifting of the wooden shapes transforms the parts into the whole picture. Now I can start to see the fiery tendrils of connections that enable another awareness. The dragon was blood red. It felt primal. As the first wash of colour went onto the drum, I seemed to connect with something vaster. At the moment that the paint, the drum, and my awareness connected, I felt the dragon's tail twitch deep in my being. The air seemed to go thick and I felt a tingling in my ears. I found myself disappearing into each brushstroke, around and around into a spiralling vortex of red. The dragon appeared around the rim of the drum; its coils wound ever tighter, flames burst from its mouth....

I had become the blood-red fire dragon through what felt like aeons of time. I recorded that my body knew the dragon, deep down, even while I was not consciously aware. I sensed that the blood-red dragon was the fire of my passion, my en-

ergy, my life-spirit and my soul in contact with nature and what felt like primal ancestors. It seemed that after my experience with the dragon whilst painting the drum, a sort of thunderbolt had opened up a different perception.

Some time later, I was walking on the South Downs and had another connection with the dragon as an all-encompassing force of nature, but this time it was more calm and measured. I had stopped to look at a reflection of a beautiful sweet chestnut tree in a lake alongside Glyndebourne, a well-known opera house nestling in the rolling Sussex countryside. The water of the lake seemed to hold memories of other worlds and, as I looked deep into its depths and I felt that I was experiencing the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon mythological cosmic tree Yggdrasil in my imagination. The world tree seemed to encapsulate a 'mind in nature', a 'total field or relations'. I sensed that here, perhaps, was the dragon. I thought of Níðhöggr, the dragon that resides at the bottom of Yggdrasil chewing its roots. Níðhöggr gnaws the roots of the tree as a reminder that death is a necessary part of life – as he is a manifestation of destruction, so new branches and leaves are produced. A magical example of non-contradiction: the existence of life in death. The reflections on the water encompassed the magic of the tree with the weaving of different realities of the surface reflecting

the skies through the depths of the water. It seemed as though the multiple worlds were communicating with me as they surfaced from deep channels under the water's surface, and from somewhere inexpressible by words.

This experience took me back to the time when I was working on my doctoral thesis on British magicians. As part of my research, I had studied the Kabbalistic Tree of Life as an apprentice ceremonial magician and learned that the first lesson in working magic was to 'know thyself', a take on the ancient Greek aphorism found on the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The Kabbalah is a sacred Jewish mystical glyph of esoteric knowledge arranged around ten symbolic spheres, each one having intrinsic qualities. The student of Kabbalah meditates on each of these spheres in turn, and on the connecting pathways between the spheres, to deepen their awareness of themselves and their connection with God with the aim of increasing their spirituality. All the spheres are interconnected, and while they each have their own attributes they are also related one to another, and to the inner self of the practitioner, as well as the whole cosmos. Together they represent the creation of existence and all reality, both material and spiritual. Learning to live my life through understanding what the Kabbalistic spheres meant to me personally and universally, I came to interlink the mythical

geography of the Tree of Life with day-to-day experience. Rather than seeing it as an abstract 'out there' cosmological tree, I incorporated it into my own life to make it meaningful¹⁶.

Remembering this early research on the Tree of Life, my mind started opening to the landscape of the mythological imagination, associating one thing with another. I stood and stared at the landscape before me at Glyndebourne, the sweet chestnut tree drew me into what I had experienced through my magical training, and these words came, as if from somewhere deep inside:

*Lily pads floating on the lake,
gleaming.
Sweet chestnut tree, majestic, towers over,
reflected darkly in the water,
glistening.
Into the ripple-depths,
clouds float among the branches.
Rising to the surface
there to be glimpsed,
fleetingly.*

The sweet chestnut tree mirrored in the water seemed to encapsulate all of life in that moment – the lily pad surface of the lake, the sky floating among the branches and a hint of the ripple depths, the dark mysteries beneath. It was here below that I sensed the dragon was lurking in my subconscious. I needed to try and go deeper. The water of the lake seemed to hold memories of other worlds inhabited in the encompassing work of the Imagination of

¹⁶ See *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld*, Oxford: Berg, 2000: 49-62

William Blake. As I looked deep into the water's depths, I felt that I was deep into Yggdrasil, the mythological world tree. The reflections on the water encompassed the imagination of the tree with the weaving of different realities of the surface and depths of the water. It seemed as though the multiple worlds were communicating as they surfaced from deep channels under the water's surface, and from somewhere inexpressible by words:

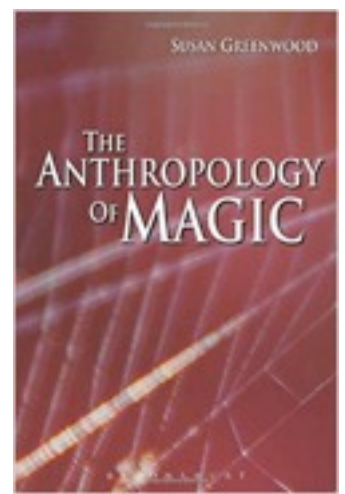
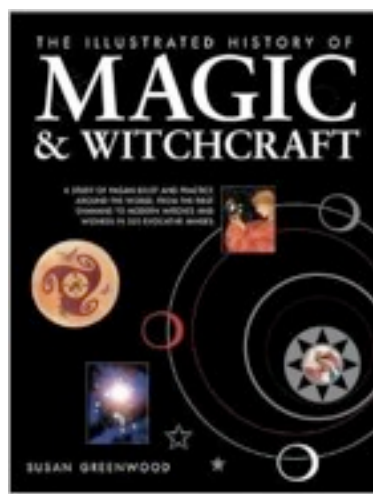
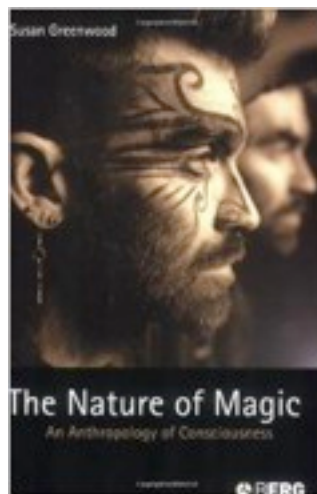
I notice that I am standing in a completely round cavern deep inside the earth. My eyes slowly adjust to the faint light and see that the walls are perfectly smooth and that the floor is even. I look upwards and see that there is an opening in the roof. Slowly I focus my eyes and see beyond the opening out into the night sky glittering with stars. I realize that I am a part of the sky. As I look closer I make out a structure against the sky – it is the roots of an upturned tree. The tree's roots fan out like a black raven's wing into the stars. My eyes follow the trunk downwards into the cavern and I see that the branches of the tree unfold into a blue-

black pool in the centre of the cavern floor. Looking deeper, I see my reflection. My eyes meet the eyes of the dragon emerging out of the watery blackness.

The dragon moves towards me, the dragon within: my soul thread spinning through space.

A burbling chuckle seems to emerge within, as water arising from a spring deep within the earth and I laugh.

However, another confrontation with the dragon – this time one that was completely terrifying with what seemed like Blake's Tyger's burning eyes – would come while I was conducting fieldwork with Mad Shamans, an eclectic group of practitioners of magic. We were at Cae Mabon, a retreat space of several indigenous dwellings situated in a clearing amid an oak forest in Snowdonia, north Wales¹⁷. This was the land of the red dragon. Although the lands of Wales are associated with Celtic mythology, nonetheless there is an underlying



¹⁷ *The Nature of Magic* Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005: vii.
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magical truth that underpins all mythologies. The experiences that they induce are similar, despite social, cultural and political divisions that emphasise difference.

These tribal differences are symbolized in a battle between red dragon of Wales (*Y Ddraig Goch*) and the English white dragon that might be Níðhöggr, the Anglo-Saxon dragon who resides at the bottom of Yggdrasil chewing its roots. In Arthurian legend the wizard Merlin had a vision of a red dragon, symbolic of the Celtic British people, and a white dragon, representative of the invading Anglo-Saxons, fighting beneath the hill fort of Ambrosious Dinas Emrys in north west Wales¹⁸. Subconsciously I knew that the dark dragon was calling me into the realm of Hel, or the Celtic underworld of Gwyn ap Nudd, a spirit being that I had already encountered during a Wild Hunt in Norfolk also whilst doing anthropological fieldwork¹⁹. My task in confronting my fear was to go deeper into the realm of the archetypal primordial dragon, deeper than the red dragon and deeper than the white dragon, to a place

where tribal battles have no significance. I had to face the dragon deep within. In characteristic form, the dragon shifts into many dragons. However, underlying all dragons is the magical truth that lies within the raw elements of place, the spirits of nature.

Having elected to sleep alone in a black shavan, an Iranian canvas tent designed for the nomadic life of the desert, I wanted to know what it would feel like to be so directly alone with the elements in this most elemental of places. Erected under a small copse of trees by the side of a fast-flowing river whose waters came thundering down from the mountainside, the shavan had steam-bent oak laths fitting into a central dome-shaped wheel; it was anchored to the ground by a rope and held together with a large peg driven into the earth; it was the dark womb of the black dragon. That night in the womb of the dragon was like no other I have ever experienced. The sound of the water was deafening; it drove my numbed mind into spiralling eddies of whirlpools and underground currents.

¹⁸ According to this mythology, Vortigern, the fifth-century leader of the Britons, fled to Dinas Emrys to escape the Anglo-Saxon invaders. Every day his men tried to build fortification, but they were thwarted in the task every morning when they found the masonry they had built the previous day collapsed in a pile. Eventually, Vortigern sought help from the boy wizard Merlin who explained that the hill fort could not be erected on the site because underneath was a pool containing two dragons, one red for the Britons, the other white for the Anglo-Saxons, who were battling for supremacy. The dragons were put there by Lludd, a ruler of Britain about 100 BCE, according to the Mabinogion, a collection of 11-12th century Celtic stories that come from an older oral tradition. Apparently, the dragons' hideous scream so upset the Britons that it was the cause of panic throughout the land. Needing assistance to resolve the matter, Lludd was advised by his brother Llefelys, a King of Gaul, who said the scream was caused by the dragon of the Britons being defeated by an alien dragon. Lludd then captured both dragons in a beer-filled cauldron and buried them at Dinas Emrys. The fighting dragons represent different tribal loyalties and political battles over land expressed in folklore.

¹⁹ See, *The Nature of Magic* New York and Oxford: Berg 2005: 119-142

In the all-consuming marauding blackness, I was visited by elemental spirits of the river, the trees, the earth, and beings that were so totally non-human that they took me to a place of extreme terror. I experienced myself being engulfed and consumed by what felt like an alien elemental otherness. No words can fully express the feeling, but bare, cold, desolate, exposed and stark come close to the experience of having all security of life removed in a confrontation with the waters of this place as they crashed down the mountainside.

Surprised, I realized that I was still alive when I eventually woke as dawn was breaking. My tongue had erupted in mouth ulcers from the trauma. I felt totally exhilarated that I had undergone what seemed to me as an initiation into life itself. My fear of being alone with the elemental spirits had led me into a direct confrontation with the unknown, in Blake's words in his Tyger poem, 'What the hammer? What the chain?/ in what furnace was thy brain?/ what the anvil? what dread grasp/ dare its deadly terrors clasp?' I realized that when I had faced my fear the alien elements of nature - the fearsome beast of the dragon - became a force within nature that would be my ally. Fear had been replaced by a sense of my own strength. Experiencing the dark monster-dragon brought me something wonderful that I could not have imagined: I found that through enduring terror I became more aware of not only my security,

but also my passion for life. This is one of the mysteries of the dragon. A confrontation with death had reminded me to experience life. How simple, yet how amazingly profound. The dragon had shown me something of the continuity between life and death. In my analytical mind it brought me back to the principle of non-contradiction and the existence of apparent mutually incompatible and exclusive states. Here with the dragon I had discovered death in life, and a unity and multiplicity of being.

My experience of revisiting my life synchronically through the dragon had given me personal insight, but the anthropologist in me required further explication. In my search for explanation, I turned to Bateson's exploration of Jung's *Seven Sermons to the Dead*; the result of Jung's three evenings of psychic exploration in 1916, and which Bateson considered a much healthier first step than Descartes' dualism of mind and matter. Jung had outlined differences between *pleroma*, an eternal unstructured totality containing all opposites and all qualities - both the beginning and the end of created beings - and *creatura*, the individual ego, a part of pleroma that creates difference and distinctiveness in space and time. In this case, individuation was represented by the figure of Abraxas, the first archetype of all things. Abraxas appears to be one of

creatura's ways of understanding the immensity of pleroma²⁰. Bateson developed Jung's ideas in his search for an epistemology of living forms in patterns of recursive, non-linear systems. For Bateson, there were pathways for messages between pleroma, creatura and Abraxas. The pleroma can be translated into the language of creatura through metaphor, 'the organizing glue' of the world of mental process. While Abraxas worked as a transpersonal metaphor for biological unity and mind in nature for Bateson, any metaphor will do. It is the connection that is important, not the symbol of that connection – the metaphor must have meaning for the individual. The movement of communication between metaphors is a move from the duality of Cartesian mind and matter²¹.

Here was one way of seeing the dragon, as a metaphor, a deeply embedded pattern of thinking arising from deep feelings of connection with nature; this seems to comprise an innate, affective and instinctual almost archetypal image. The dragon thus comes to symbolize a relational pattern in the world that helps to give shape to ephemeral feelings that are not literally

equivalent to a definitive creature but are equivalent by analogy²². Maybe the dragon was my way of starting to understand the wholeness of pleroma, the wholeness of nature? We cannot be aware of the enormity of all of nature, says Bateson, most of it is imperceptible; the only appearances of which we can be aware are cracks and planes of fracture in a timeless matrix²³. These ruptures can be entered through dreams, visions, myths and reflections in magical consciousness. Above all, they demonstrate to me that 'everything is connected'. And that is the simple, but also profound, participatory lesson that comes from the dragon.

To sum up this introduction, I can say that by circumventing a focus on belief in magic I hope I have taken an examination of the seemingly anomalous experience of magic further. By outlining my own experience of the process of magical consciousness, I have discovered that anomalous occurrences are not phenomenon in themselves but a lived participatory analogical experience that - when viewed not as isolated events but as part of a synchronous pattern - can change the way we see the

²⁰ Carl Jung 'Seven Sermons to the Dead' in *The Gnostic Jung* selected and introduced by Robert A. Segal. London: Routledge, 1992: 182.

²¹ Tim Ingold, while valuing Bateson's work criticizes what he calls his 'two-faced ecology' as seemingly being 'unable to shake off the most fundamental opposition between form and substance' (Ingold, 2000: 16-19). In my opinion this criticism is unjustified, it does not do justice to Bateson's understanding of totality of existence exemplified by Jung's use of the term 'pleroma'.

²² Erik D. Goodwyn *The Neurobiology of the Gods: How Brain Physiology Shapes the Recurrent Imagery of Myth and Dreams*, London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

²³ Gregory Bateson *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* New York: Bantam, 1988: 14.

world. They are not something that deviates from what is standard, normal, or expected, nor are they atypical, irregular, aberrant, exceptional, freakish, odd, bizarre, peculiar, unusual, out of the ordinary, deviant, mutant or any of the other descriptive terms found in a dictionary. On the contrary, they are part of what makes us human when seen through a process of patterns of relationships. A self-awareness of emotion and intuition, connectedness and associations with nature, all hallmarks of magical consciousness, are currently under-recognized, especially in the natural and social sciences. These qualities teach us to work with nature. This holds both within the individual learning to balance emotion and intuition with reason and analysis – heart as well as head – but also extends outwards to all relationships with the human and environmental worlds.

Recent Chapters in Journals and Edited Volumes

2011 Mark A. Schroll and Susan Greenwood 'World Views in Collision – World Views in Metamorphosis: Toward a Multi-State Paradigm.' *Anthropology of Consciousness* 22 (1), pps 49-60.

2012 'Toward an Epistemology of Imaginal Aliterity: Fieldwork with the Dragon' in *The Social Life of Spirits*, edited by Diana Espirito Santo and Ruy Llera Blanes, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2013 'Magical Consciousness: A Legitimate Form of knowledge?' in *Defining Magic: a*

Reader, edited by Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg for the Critical Categories in the Study of Religion series, London: Equinox Publishing.

2013 'On Becoming and Owl' in *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*, edited by Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston. London: Routledge.

2014 'Interplay of Perspectives in the Anthropology of Consciousness: A Commentary on Stanley Krippner's 'Differentiating Experiences from Events, and Validity from Authenticity in Anthropological Research' *Paranthropology* Vol. 5. No. 4.

Selected published Books

Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology: Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000.

The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005.

The Anthropology of Magic Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009.

Magical Consciousness: An Anthropological and Neurobiological Approach with Erik D. Goodwyn. New York: Routledge, 2015.



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Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology, and a new book, *The Anthropology of Magic*. She is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the University of Sussex.

A Framework of Belief in Paranormal Experiences and its Relation to Positive/Negative Schizotypy

Alejandro Parra



Abstract

Background: Paranormal experiences that fit into a prior framework of belief are seen as more pleasant, while individuals without such a framework find them intrusive and disturbing.

Methods: Undergraduate students (no paranormal experiences group, N= 1574) and people who attended workshops on paranormal/spiritual topics (paranormal experiences group, N= 416) completed two questionnaires, the OLIFE which assesses schizotypy in four dimensions and the Paranormal Experiences Questionnaire which collects information on spontaneous paranormal experiences.

Objectives: To test people who have more experiences and paranormal beliefs are able to cope with potentially distressing effects of such experiences.

Results: Members of the paranormal experiences group were less cognitively disorganised and tended to have more unusual paranormal experiences. Individuals with more paranormal beliefs/experiences may indeed be able to cope better with the potentially distressing effects of such experiences.

Discussion: Individuals with more unusual experiences may be able to 'buffer' their potentially distressing effects through the existence or construction of a framework in which to place them; for the no paranormal experiences group (individuals without a belief framework), positive schizotypy might, in fact, be adaptive, as highly magical thinking provides a better chance of creating an effective and imaginative framework to account for the odd experiences.

Keywords: Belief framework; Paranormal beliefs/experiences; Schizotypy; Magical thinking; Distressing effect.

In recent years, it has examined the relationship between schizotypal personality traits and paranormal beliefs. Windholz and

Diamant (1) found that believers in the paranormal scored significantly higher on the schizophrenia subscale of the Inventory

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality (2) compared with a group of non-believers in the paranormal. Thalbourne (7) found that college students who believed and claimed to have had experiences with the paranormal tended to score higher on the Magical Ideation Scale (3) and Perceptual Aberration Scale (3). Wolfradt et al. (4) concluded that the perceptual aspects of schizotypy and magical thinking are indicators of processes that are associated with vulnerability to psychosis.

Negative schizotypy, identified as a separate factor of schizotypy, and usually evaluated in terms of physical anhedonia and / or social, can be an indicator of risk of mental disturbance, for example, Mason, Claridge and Williams (5) found in based on a sample of creative artists and poets, the anhedonia negatively correlated with creativity. The authors argue that anhedonia is what differentiates the positive schizotypy creative people of clinical individuals. People with "high positive and low negative" (and therefore, in healthy condition) can channel their creativity via schizotypal tendencies, scores while individuals with scores "high negative and low positive" (and therefore dysfunctional) succumb to the desorganizativos effects of positive schizotypy and generate disorders.

There seems to be largely anecdotal evidence of a link between paranormal belief and psychosis proneness. Based on the criteria of Claridge (8) according to which magical thinking is a symptom of schizotypy, the latter was operationalized as

magical thinking or ideation." Chapman, Chapman and Raulin (3) built the Magical Ideation Scale, for which there is also a relationship with the propensity to psychosis, like schizophrenia. Both define magical thinking as "belief" and poses experiences as an invalid causation" (p. 215). Moreira-Almeida and Menezes (9) reviewed the concept of "spiritual and religious issues" and the relationship between religion, spirituality and psychosis based on the DSM-IV, concluding that although they may seem to psychotic episodes, are actually manifestations not pathological spiritual and religious experiences. Both authors raise a number of criteria that could be used for differential diagnosis between healthy spiritual experiences and mental disorders of religious content. The importance of this issue and the lack of quality research point to the need for further research (see 6). Indeed, certain spiritual experiences can often be confused with psychotic and dissociative symptoms. There are nine identified by consensus among researchers that could indicate a proper distinction between spiritual experiences and psychotic and dissociative disorders criteria, such as lack of psychological distress, lack of social and occupational impairment, short experience, critical attitude (doubt the reality of the experience), support for cultural or religious group, absence of co-morbidities, control over the experience, personal growth over time, and an attitude to help others (10; 11).

There was a trend for people to have experienced negative schizotypy lower

scores than those who had no experience, and a higher level of perceptual-cognitive in those who did not experience schizotypy. This does not necessarily have psychopathological consequences for the individual, people have paranormal experiences may simply be more sensitive to anomalous perceptual experiences have. Parra and Espinosa Paul (12) found greater cognitive-perceptual schizotypy in individuals who claim to be able to see the "aura" or energy field surrounding a person compared to those without this experience. Possibly, these people have a much more intense imaginative life. Parra and Espinosa (12) also found greater cognitive-perceptual schizotypy and proneness to hallucination people that read have extrasensory experiences. These findings suggest that there are other underlying dissociative processes, such as absorption and fantasy proneness, which are associated with such experiences.

Importantly, paranormal experiences and beliefs are different concepts, but both elements sometimes overlap on the scales (13). Paranormal experiences may have an adaptive function, and even also "protective". Gómez Montanelli and Parra (14) suggested that paranormal beliefs represent a cognitive defense against uncertainty, while others are related to psychopathology, especially schizotypy. Parra and Espinoza (12) also found a significant difference in positive symptoms of schizotypy in the group of spiritual students and non-spiritual" ($p = 0.02$) but not significant for negative symptoms. It was also noted that all paranormal

experiences correlated significantly with the positive symptoms of schizotypy. Although phenomena such as telepathy and see the aura was not associated with negative symptoms of schizotypy, however, a significant correlation between the out of body experience, the feeling of presence, and the experience of seeing apparitions with negative symptoms was found, but substantially less than the positive symptoms.

This paper tests the hypothesis that people who have more experiences and paranormal beliefs are able to cope with potentially distressing effects of such experiences. Specifically, (1) that the paranormal group will score higher on Unusual experiences, Cognitive disorganization, Introverted anhedonia, Impulsive Nonconformity, the total score of the sub-factors of schizotypy and positive schizotypy, negative schizotypy compared to no paranormal group, (2) the index of the paranormal group correlated positively with unusual experiences and subfactor scores positive/negative schizotypy, and (3) that the score of non-paranormal experiences paranormal group (students) correlated positively with subfactors Unusual experiences, Cognitive disorganization, Introverted anhedonia, Impulsive nonconformity, the total score of the sub-factors of schizotypy and positive schizotypy, negative schizotypy.

METHOD

Participants

Paranormal group: The sample consisted of 416 participants, 309 (74%) females and 107 (26%) males, who were all well-educated and believed in psi. Their ages ranged from 17 to 83 ($M = 44.29$; $SD = 13.64$). Participants were recruited through media announcements in newspapers and an e-mail list at the Institute of Paranormal Psychology. An announcement placed on a web page (www.alipsi.com.ar) provided a brief explanation of the test procedure and encouraged people to schedule an interview with the authors in order to obtain more information. The participants met during two-hour workshops, free of charge, organized at the Institute of Paranormal Psychology (IPP) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Participants completed both questionnaires in a counterbalanced way. Participants were recruited through advertisements in media and email list. An advertisement was also placed on a web page (www.alipsi.com.ar). The announcement contains a brief explanation of the procedure and encouraged participants to arrange an interview with us for more information.

Non-paranormal group: From a total of 1850 undergraduate students recruited from the psychology department, I received 1574 usable questionnaires (85%). The participants were adults, most of them students at the South Campus at the Universidad Abierta Interamericana in the Buenos Aires area. Since I was interested in obtaining as many reports as possible, I included 5 non-students, who were referred to me by the participants. In all cases these individu-

als were family members or friends of the students who referred them. Participation was voluntary, and the participants received no pay. The students who returned the questionnaires included 909 (57%) females and 665 (43%) males, ranging in age from 15 to 83 (Mean = 33.84; $SD = 12.84$).

Procedure

The set of scales was presented in a single envelope. Each person, after receiving vague information about the aims of the study, was invited to complete the scales anonymously. The students who requested questionnaires were given a cover letter and copies of both instruments at the same time. The returned questionnaires, which were stored unexamined throughout the recruitment and collection periods, were given the pseudo-title *Questionnaire of Psychological Experiences, Forms A and B*, in a counterbalanced order to encourage unbiased responses.

An appropriate informed consent was obtained, using language presumed to be understandable by the participants. The content of the informed consent implied that the person (1) had the capacity to consent, (2) had been informed of all significant information concerning the procedure, and (3) had freely and without undue influence expressed consent. In addition, participants received information that the consent had been appropriately documented.

Design and Materials

RESULTS

Table 1: FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF PARANORMAL EXPERIENCES

Paranormal Experiences Questionnaire	Paranormal	Non-paranormal
	Group	group
	(N= 416)	(N= 1574)
1. ESP Dreams	331 (79.6%)	628 (39.9%)
2. Telepathy	285 (68.5%)	608 (38.6%)
3. Aura	191 (45.9%)	236 (15.0%)
4. Out-of-body experiences	127 (30.5%)	288 (18.3%)
5. Sense of Presence	240 (57.7%)	623 (39.6%)
6. Mediumship/Possession	211 (50.7%)	172 (10.9%)
7. Spontaneous PK	256 (61.5%)	273 (17.3%)
8. Healing Experience	333 (80.0%)	322 (20.5%)
9. Mystical Experience	223 (53.6%)	226 (14.3%)
10. Apparitional Experiences	147 (35.3%)	186 (11.8%)

Table 2: COMPARISON OF O-LIFE SCORES AND INDEX OF PARANORMAL GROUP WITH NON-PARANORMAL GROUP

O-LIFE	Group (a)		z
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
1. Unusual Experiences (UE)	.73 (1.12)	.34 (.24)	14.40***
2. Cognitive Disorganisation (CD)	.78 (1.28)	.42 (.23)	5.90***
3. Introverted Anhedonia (IA)	.87 (.92)	.34 (.23)	18.56***
4. Impulsive Nonconformity (INC)	.46 (.55)	.29 (.20)	5.53***
Positive schizotypy (UE + CD)	1.51 (2.33)	.76 (.40)	11.54***
Negative schizotypy (IA + INC)	1.34 (1.41)	.63 (.37)	15.04***
O-LIFE (Total)	2.87 (3.64)	1.39 (.63)	14.23***

(a) Since the data were not normally distributed, the U de

Mann-Whitney test was used to test the hypotheses (all p

value one-tailed). Spearman's Rho correlation * $p < .01$; **

$p < .005$; *** $p < .001$

(b) Paranormal N= 416 and Non-paranormal N= 1574.

Table 3: CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SCHIZOTYPY SCORES AND INDEX OF EXPERIENCES (a)

	Unusual Experiences	Cognitive Disorganisation	Introvertive Anhedonia	Impulsive Nonconformity	Total O-LIFE	Positive schizotypy	Negative schizotypy
Index							
(Paranormal group) (b)	.104*	-.132*	.058	.027	.028	.036	.016
Index (Non- paranormal group) (b)	.281**	.048*	.056	-.131**	.111**	.189**	-.018

(a) Spearman's Rho * $p = .01$; ** $p = .005$; *** $p < .001$

(b) 1= No experiences to 10 = All experiences.

Oxford-Liverpool Inventory of Feelings and Experiences (O-LIFE) (13): This instrument is a validated 150-item questionnaire assessing schizotypy in terms of four dimensions. Positive schizotypy is assessed by Unusual Experiences and Cognitive Disorganisation. Negative schizotypy is assessed by Introvertive Anhedonia and Impulsive Nonconformity. Phenomenologically related to the positive symptoms of psychosis, it measures a trait often termed "positive schizotypy". Norms for the questionnaire are reported by Mason et al. (13) and Mason, Claridge, and Williams (5). Psychometric evaluation of the O-LIFE has shown good test-retest reliability (coefficient alpha = .80), as well as acceptable internal consistency (coefficient alpha > .77). The Cronbach alpha measure of internal consistency was .91 in the Argentine O-LIFE.

Unusual Perceptual Experiences Questionnaire (CEPI) (15). It is a questionnaire of 14

items that includes subjective unusual perceptual experiences, such as precognitive dreams, telepathy, see aura, out of body experiences, sense of presence, mediumship, possession, healing experience (as a healer), déjà vu, mystical experiences, appearances (seeing ghosts), among others, is answered as "never", "rarely" or "multiple times." The internal reliability of CEPI is good with a Cronbach's alpha of .88, the test-retest reliability was determined in 66 participants who completed the CEPI at a second time, after 6 months, and found acceptable to all measurements when testing with Pearson correlations (.92) and demonstrates that this inner reliability remained stable with time. A construct validity was also assessed by correlating the total score with the subscales of CEPI Anomalous Experiences Inventory (AEI) (21). The total score of CEPI shows significant positive correlations with the subscales of Unusual Experi-

ences AEI producing a good convergent validity.

Analysis

Data were loaded and processed using *SPSS 20*. Was carried out an assessment of the normality of the sample. From the values obtained (Shapiro-Wilks statistic), an asymmetric distribution of the scores of both instruments was assumed. Therefore, non-parametric statistics are used. To compare the two samples | Animal | Mann-Whitney was used, and to correlate Spearman Rho was used. Hypothesis 1 was that the paranormal group would score higher on Unusual Experiences, Cognitive Disorganisation, Introvertive Anhedonia, and Impulsive Nonconformity, as well as receive a higher O-LIFE total score and positive/negative schizotypy scores than the nonparanormal. This hypothesis was supported: the mean for experients was significantly higher than that for nonexperients (Mean $z = 13.28$, $p < .001$, one-tailed) (see Table 2).

Hypothesis 2 was that the paranormal group would score higher on Index (psi count experiences) scores than the non-paranormal. This hypothesis was also supported: the mean (6.36) for experients was significantly higher than that for nonexperients (3.00) ($p < .001$, one-tailed) (see Table 2).

Hypothesis 3 was that the Index in the Paranormal group would correlate positively on Unusual Experiences and positive/negative schizotypy scores, which was sup-

ported only for Unusual Experiences ($r_s = .104$). In an inverse direction, the Index correlated negatively on Cognitive Disorganisation ($r_s = -.132$) (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 4 was that the Index in the non-paranormal group of students would correlate positively in Unusual Experiences, Cognitive Disorganisation, Introvertive Anhedonia, Impulsive Nonconformity, O-LIFE total score, and positive/negative schizotypy scores, which was supported only for Unusual Experiences ($r_s = .281$), Cognitive Disorganisation ($r_s = .048$), Introvertive Anhedonia ($r_s = .056$), Total O-LIFE ($r_s = .111$), and Positive schizotypy ($r_s = .189$). In an inverse direction, the Index correlated negatively on Impulsive Nonconformity ($r_s = -.131$) (see Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The analyses revealed a relationship between positive schizotypy and paranormal experiences for the non-paranormal group, but no correlation for the paranormal group; in line with predictions, the group with paranormal experiences and the group with a framework of paranormal beliefs) were both less cognitively disorganised. Positive but not negative schizotypy predicted paranormal experiences, also in line with predictions, with high anhedonia associated with paranormal experiences in the paranormal group.

Paranormal group members were both less cognitively disorganised and tended to have more unusual incidents in relation to their paranormal experiences. Individuals with more paranormal beliefs/experiences

may be able to cope better with the potentially distressing effects of such experiences. A limitation the present study did not examine the paranormal beliefs of the participants. However, other studies (16, 17, 18, 19) found that paranormal beliefs and experiences are strongly correlated (for a review of studies and meta-analyses, see 20). The sample of individuals in the group was composed of students a wide range of students, which may have biased the sample. We must be cautious in interpreting the results. However, future studies may improve the design and help to better understand the relationship between these variables.

For the paranormal group, individuals who have more unusual paranormal experiences may be able to 'buffer' their potentially distressing effects via the existence or construction of a framework in which to place them; for the non-paranormal group (individuals without a beliefs framework), positive schizotypy might, in fact, be adaptive, as highly magical thinking provides a better chance of creating an effective and imaginative framework to account for the odd experiences, as implied by Claridge's (8) results. For these individuals, the lack of a 'buffer' results in experiences being seen as strange and overwhelming, perhaps indicative of some disorder or 'abnormality'.

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Research Perspectives in Parapsychology and Shamanism

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Shamans can be defined as socially-designated practitioners who purport to obtain information or exert influence useful to their social group, and in ways not ordinarily available to their peers. The term “shaman” is a social construct and, as such, is applied to men and women whose communities have their own terms for describing these practitioners. Dating back at least 30,000 years, shamans report experiences that parapsychologists would conceptualize as putative psi phenomena -- reported interactions between organisms and their environment (including other organisms) in which information and influence have taken place that cannot be explained through conventional science’s understanding of sensory-motor channels. In other words, these reports are anomalous because they appear to preclude the constraints of time, space, and energy as understood by Western science. This first-hand report is typical of many such recollections:

It is 1972, and we are standing in a parking lot in gathering twilight. Maybe there are 20 of us, including half a dozen physicians. Standing there, leaning in, we are watching a Shoshone shaman, Rolling Thunder attempt to heal the wound of a teenager boy lying on a massage table. It

is a painful wound, torn into the muscle of his leg, and the boy is clearly in discomfort, and just as obviously medicated. He got this wound through some kind of accident. And it is not healing properly; which is what has brought him to this Virginia Beach parking lot at the back of Edgar Cayce’s old hospital, now the headquarters of the Association for Research and Enlightenment (A.R.E.), the organization founded in 1931 to preserve Cayce’s readings, discourses given while Cayce lay seemingly asleep but actually in a state of non-local awareness, in which time and space took on different meanings. It seems fitting to be standing here, a generation later, watching for signs of another non-local phenomenon, namely therapeutic intent expressed as physical healing.

For many reasons Edgar Cayce should be acknowledged as the father of complementary and alternative medicine. His observations about health and his therapeutics are today as fully integrated and general as no longer to be associated with him. They are part of the contemporary paradigm. But the therapeutic intent, about which Cayce spoke, the idea that the consciousness of one person can therapeutically affect the well-being of another is still very controversial. If this works I will see something, we all will, that shouldn’t be possible -- if the world is strictly physical.

A small log fire that I had built earlier at Rolling Thunder’s request, flickers on the ground, and is just below the boy’s

head. I am here as a journalist. This ceremony is taking place as a part of my interview with Rolling Thunder. Some of my income comes from writing for the *Virginian-Pilot* about unusual people who come to Virginia Beach, which typically means coming to the A.R.E.

Hugh Lynn Cayce, the A.R.E.'s Executive Director, called late on Monday afternoon to say a shaman, a medicine man, as he explained it, was coming. If I wanted to interview him I could pick him up at the Greyhound station and talk to him that afternoon. Saturday he would be doing a traditional Native American healing ritual, which I was welcome to attend. That's how I first heard about Rolling Thunder. Of course I accept, and he gives me the time. Four o'clock. I have to check the location; it seems so improbable, "The Greyhound bus station in Norfolk?" "The same," Hugh Lynn replies.

I had done a number of these interviews, and was thinking of doing a book comprised of them. Although I had interviewed some other journalists, and a few scientists, many of the people I had met through Hugh Lynn put themselves forward as spiritual teachers and were accepted, by at least some people, as being the genuine article. Having spent hours talking to these men and women, listening to their stories, their answers to my questions, their affect, how they dressed, how they stood, their eyes, what I can only call their beingness, I have begun to develop some discernment. It is clear to me that authenticity is in part a measure of the continuity between the public persona and private personality. To the degree they are not one and the same that person seems diminished.

About a month before, Hugh Lynn had alerted me to the arrival of an Indian of another type, a Hindu priest from India. He arrived in a Cadillac accompanied by an entourage. In the trunk of the car was the food he would eat, as well as

the pans it would be prepared in, and the dishes upon which it would be served. "The master is so evolved, he is barely in touch with the physical plane anymore," an acolyte, a senyasin once explained to me as he brought out the boxes. "Wow," I thought. "This man must be in a truly exalted state of consciousness." I looked forward to hearing him speak later that night. During the event, however, he was quite disappointing. He had beautiful diction, but spoke almost nothing but platitudes and slogans. By the time he was through I realized I was dealing with shtick, whether consciously contrived or not I couldn't tell. But it taught me a lesson I never forgot: If an expert is someone from more than 100 miles away with a briefcase, a holy man may be only someone from a distant land, practicing an unfamiliar faith, with a different set of altar ornaments.

This is still very much in my mind on a hot summer afternoon as I drive down to the Greyhound station. The Norfolk iteration of this cultural institution comes complete with the usual crowd: Sailors are joshing one another. Marines are playing a game of blackjack; old black ladies are sitting cooling themselves with paper church fans. And leaning up against the snack counter I spot a middle-aged Indian, with an unblocked cowboy hat, an old tweed jacket, and a bolo tie with a turquoise slide. He is eating some cheddar cheese Nabs, and drinking a coke. He smokes a pipe, I can tell, because it is sticking out of the breast pocket of his jacket.

We introduce ourselves, and he picks up a small bag and we walk out to the car. Twenty minutes later we are driving down Shore Drive, which parallels the coast, and he asks me to stop at a supermarket. Would I go in and buy two steaks? Sure. In those days I was a vegetarian, really a vegan, and buying steaks for a powerful shaman seems very odd.

But hospitality demands his request be honored, so I go into the market and buy him two of the best Porterhouse cuts they have. A mile further and Shore Drive cuts through a state park, and suddenly we are in beach wilderness such as the 16th century colonists would have seen, and it runs on for several miles. We are about midway through when Rolling Thunder asks me to pull over. Reaching for his bag, he opens the door and gets out of the car, asking me when he is supposed to be at the A.R.E. I think he wants to take a leak. But no; he clearly intends to leave me. About seven p.m., I say, he thanks me, asks me to build a small fire where he is to work, and turns and walks down the bank and into the woods. "Don't forget the steaks," he says as he strolls away. He is completely natural in all of this. It is not being done for effect and, as it is happening, it seems the most obvious and appropriate thing for him to be doing. Only, as I watch him vanish into the trees, does it become clear how unusual this is. Presumably he is going to sleep in the woods.

Rolling Thunder reminds me of a Polish sergeant I once met. He was so thoroughly secure in his esoteric skill set that what seemed improbable he did with effortless competence. I realize they are just different kinds of warriors.

The next afternoon I go up to the A.R.E. with the steaks in a cooler. Someone has moved a massage table out into the parking lot. Not quite sure where the fire should be I gather wood from the forest that borders the back of the parking lot, and set it up near the table, then leave for an early dinner. When I get back, just before seven, a crowd has gathered. I get the cooler out of the car, and go over and light the fire.

Hugh Lynn comes over wearing an ironed white shirt without a tie and a windbreaker. He always reminds me of a prosperous small town banker. In fact he has the mind of a Medici, and is the most

interesting person I have met doing these interviews. He introduces me to two of the doctors, then goes over to the vans parked nearby, and talks with two women. They are the mothers who have accompanied their sons. Inside each van one of the boys to be healed lies quietly in the back. It is twilight now and I can see them framed in the overhead light in the vans. Another physician almost in silhouette moves between them.

Precisely at seven Rolling Thunder, looking exactly as he had the prior day walks out of the woods holding his small bag. He goes up to Hugh Lynn who, seeing him coming, calls everyone together. He says a few words of introduction, and while he does this Rolling Thunder kneels down and pulls out from the bag what I can see, from maybe three feet away, is the breast and extended wing of a crow or raven. The pinion feathers are spread. Seeing me, he thanks me for the fire, and asks if I have brought the steaks. I go to the cooler and bring them over. He takes one, and tears off the plastic wrap, and the paper tray, handing this back to me. He walks the few feet back to the fire and drops the steak into the gravel and dirt, next to the little fire ring of stones I have made. It is the strangest thing he has done yet, but like walking into the woods, it just seems the thing to do.

He gestures to Hugh Lynn, who goes over to one of the vans, and the boy within is brought out on a stretcher, and placed on the massage table. As Rolling Thunder talks quietly to the boy, he seems to be having trouble at first focusing on what is being said, probably because the move has caused him additional pain. But gradually he calms down and lays still, his eyes closed. His mother comes over and stands to one side. While this is going on, by unspoken consensus we observers have been slowly shuffling forward until we reach an acceptable compromise between intruding and being able to closely observe.

It turns out that this is an arc about eight feet away from the boy on the table.

Rolling Thunder begins a soft slow chant. I cannot make out the words, just the rhythm of the rising and falling sound. He begins making slow passes over the boy's form using the wing and breast of a raven, moving it just an inch or two above his body. I can see the feathers spread slightly against the air pressure as his arm sweeps along. They are long graceful strokes. Every second or third stroke he flicks the wing tip down towards the steak on the ground. As it grows darker the fire becomes more prominent, and the boy and the man drift into shadow.

It goes on monotonously. Everything else is silent. Suddenly, I notice that there is a white mist-like form taking shape around and in front of Rolling Thunder's body. Sometimes I can see it, sometimes not. But it becomes stronger, steadier, until it is continuously present. It is almost dark now, but the fire gives enough light to see. Then it takes form, slowly at first, but as if gathering energy into itself it takes form. I can clearly see that the smoke-like figure is a wolf. Rolling Thunder moves as rhythmically as a clock. Sweep. Sweep. Flick. Sweep. Sweep. Flick.

After about 30 minutes the form begins to fade, first losing shape, then becoming increasingly insubstantial. Finally, it is nothing more than a chimera, there and not there. Then it is gone. Rolling Thunder straightens up, and stops. He makes a kind of gesture, and somehow we are released and come forward. The boy is very peaceful. His mother also has come forward, and she leans over him, kissing his forehead. The wound is completely healed. It looks like your skin does when a scab falls off leaving smooth unlined pink skin, shiny in its newness. I am astonished. Clearly so is everyone else. I go over to Hugh Lynn. Hugh Lynn asks me, "What did you see?" I tell him, and when I say

the mist took form, he says, "Was it a wolf?"

There is a kind of break. People go to the bathroom or get a drink of water. About 30 minutes later we gather again. The second boy is brought out. I cannot see anything wrong with him. His mother, however, is very attentive, so something is wrong. Hugh Lynn says it is a broken bone that will not heal. Rolling Thunder asks for the second steak, and I go back to the cooler to get it. This one he also drops to the ground. He says nothing to me, and I know better than to say anything to him.

The chanting begins, and all appears to be headed towards what it once was. The mist, about two inches thick, begins to form. It grows stronger, stops flickering, but, just as it begins to take form, it stalls. It happens once, a second time, a third. This time I look around and my eyes are drawn to the mother. I have no idea how I know this, but I know the boy's mother is blocking this from happening.

As Rolling Thunder is beginning a fourth attempt he suddenly stops. He straightens up, turns and walks over to Hugh Lynn. He says, "I cannot do this. The mother will not permit it. She has a possessive mother's love, and it is very powerful." "Yes. I noticed. I'll talk to them."

Hugh Lynn goes over and talks to the doctor for a while, then the mother and the son. I can't hear them. Then he comes over to where I am standing, and says, "He was drifting away from her, now he is dependent once again. She is conflicted about giving that up."

People are departing. I can hear cars starting and, in the glare of their headlights, I go over and kick out the fire. Rolling Thunder is there before me. He reaches down and I can see the steaks. Both are withered and gray. One of them hardly looks like meat at all. "You put whatever is wrong into the steak?" "That's right. The fire will purify and release it."

He throws them into the hot coals. The fat crackles and catches fire. The two of us stand there in silence. It doesn't take long, and they are gone. During those minutes I don't know what Rolling Thunder is thinking. But I am trying to reconsider how the world works. (Adapted from Jones & Krippner, 2012, pp. 41-48)

KEY QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

Ever since shamans have reflected on their experiences, they have described reveries that appeared to transmit thoughts of another person, dreams in which they seemed to become aware of faraway events, rituals in which future happenings supposedly were predicted, and mental procedures that were said to produce direct effects on distant physical objects or living organisms (Rogo, 1987). Are these occurrences instances of what parapsychologists now refer to as "telepathy", "clairvoyance", "precognition" (e.g., "non-local information"), and "psychokinesis" (i.e., "non-local perturbation")? Or are there conventional ways to explain these reports? It is one matter to report an experience, and these reported experiences are worth studying because they yield valuable information about the shaman's inner world (Rock & Krippner, 2011). However, an event differs from an experience (Krippner, Pitchford, & Davies, 2012), and few scholars would take the position that shamanic experiences refer to a verified, veridical event (Laughlin, 2011, p. 376).

Parapsychologists who study shamanism suggest that when shamans attempt to locate lost objects, they may be demonstrating clairvoyance. When they seek to communicate with someone at a distance, they could be manifesting telepathy. When they try to divine the future, they might be displaying precognition. When they attempt to heal someone at a distance, they could be practicing psychokinesis. Purported psi phenomena are the most dramatic of the special powers that provide shamans with their authority, prestige, and stature. Can these alleged capacities be demonstrated under so-called "psi-task conditions" that would rule out such conventional explanations as logical inference, perceptual cues, subliminal perception, deception, and coincidence? This is the challenge that would establish some shamanic experiences as shamanic events.

From a philosophical standpoint, presumptive parapsychological phenomena in shamanic practices differ from "supernatural" or "miraculous" phenomena. The latter, if they exist, stand apart from nature and may even suspend or contradict natural laws and principles. Parapsychologists assume that the phenomena they investigate are lawful, natural, and -- at some point -- will "fit" into the scientific body of knowledge, either with or without a revision of the current scientific worldview.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Weiant, in a paper delivered at an American Anthropological Association convention in 1960, reviewed some ethnographic accounts of possible parapsychological phenomena, remarking: "I feel very strongly that every anthropologist, whether believer or unbeliever, should acquaint himself with the techniques of parapsychological research and make use of these, as well as any other means at his disposal, to establish what is real and what is illusion in the so-called paranormal. If it should turn out that the believers are right, there will certainly be exciting implications for parapsychology" (in Van de Castle, 1977, p. 668).

The literature in scientific parapsychology presents a varied picture of research directions, ranging from second-hand reports and interviews, to first-person informal observations, to controlled observations, to controlled experiments, as well as phenomenological accounts. This essay, in giving examples (and evaluations) of each category, does not provide a comprehensive review; however, representative studies (almost all of them from the anthropological literature) have been cited that illustrate the problems and the prospects inherent to this field of study. Each research category is followed by a critique including suggestions for future investigators.

INTERVIEW AND SECOND-HAND REPORTS

When Halifax (1979, pp.134-135) interviewed the Mazatec shaman Maria Sabina in 1977, precognition was one topic they discussed. Sabina remarked, "And you see our past and our future which are there together as a single thing already achieved, already happened. So I saw the entire life of my son Aurelio and his death and the face and the name of the man that was to kill him and the dagger with which he was going to kill him because everything had already been accomplished."

Carpenter and Krippner (1989) interviewed Rohanna Ler, an Indonesian shaman, who told them of her "call" to heal. One of Ler's sons began to lose his sight and did not respond to conventional medical treatment. When the boy's eyes began to bleed, Ler was close to utter despair. One night, Ler had a powerful dream in which an elderly man appeared and told her that it was her fate to become a healer. Her son was the first person she would heal; but if she turned down the call he would go blind and never recover his sight. The dream visitor gave Ler a stone; upon awakening she found a stone in her bed, placed it on her son's eyes, and he recovered completely. Subsequent dream visitors purportedly gave Ler a ring that she used as a "power object" in her healing sessions.

Murphy (1964, p. 60) wrote of a St. Lawrence Island Eskimo informant who recalled a shaman producing sounds as though spirits were walking underneath and around the floor of his house, until "the house seemed to shake and rattle as

though it were made of tissue paper and everything seemed to be up in the air, flying about the room". Another shaman was noted for his "fox spirit" that allegedly could be seen running around the rim of the drum while the shaman conducted a ceremony. Murphy attributed these feats to conjuring, claiming that "some shamans were more imaginative or better ventriloquists than others, while some were more dexterous at sleight of hand" (Ibid.). Murphy gave no specific explanations of the alleged techniques of legerdemain, a common omission from anthropological accounts that take a dismissive perspective toward what they have observed.

CRITIQUE

Interview material and second-hand reports can be valuable reflections on the life and beliefs of native people. However, interviewers need to be well trained so that they do not give inadvertent cues signaling the interviewee what is "expected" or what the interviewer "wants to hear." Many anthropological reports have been accepted as valid, but several decades later have fallen into disrepute as other investigators, conducting research in a more rigorous manner, have provided quite different descriptions and reports. On the other hand, an investigator who concludes that conjuring was at work needs to provide at least one plausible scenario for readers to consider. The Parapsychological Association has urged its members to consult with magicians when conducting research in which

sleight-of-hand may surreptitiously have been utilized or, better yet, to add a magician to the investigative team.

FIRST-PERSON EYEWITNESS OBSERVATION

Eyewitness observations date back to Bogoras (1904-1909) who made an intensive study of the Chuckchee Eskimos at the turn of the century. He related sitting in a tent as tribal members placed a walrus skin over the shaman's shoulders. As the shaman invoked the spirits, the walrus skin seemed to take on a life of its own. The portion draped over the shaman's back began elevating and shifting, although it never left the shaman's back. Bogoras grabbed the skin to discover how the trick was being done, but could not pull it off the shaman's back. Moreover, Bogoras claimed that he had been thrown about the tent by the skin's contortions, as the shaman sat quietly. Bogoras watched another shaman produce an incision into the skin of a client. Later, the shaman closed the opening and no trace of the incision remained.

A 1914 report by a Father Trilles concerned a Yabakou practitioner who told the priest he was about to have an out-of-the-body journey to a magicians' palaver in a distant village. The missionary expressed skepticism, and asked the practitioner to tell a student, who lived along the way, that he should come to see him at once, bringing shotgun cartridges. "After gesticulation, words, chants, and having rubbed himself all over with a reddish liquid smelling like

garlic, he fell into a lethargic sleep. His body was perfectly rigid." The priest passed the night in the shaman's hut to be sure that there was no subterfuge. Three days later, the missionary's student arrived with the cartridges (in Van de Castle, 1974, pp. 276-277).

Erdoes (1972) related attending a *yuwipi* (i.e., sweat) ceremony in a converted railroad car with members of his family and about 40 local Sioux residents. Once the kerosene lamp had been extinguished and the drumming commenced, Erdoes claims that tiny lights began to appear throughout the room, the shaman's rattles flew through the air, and Erdoes' electronic flash unit began flashing of its own accord (pp. 280-281).

Hallowell (1971) worked with the Salteaux Indians in Manitoba, Canada, and described a shamanic session held for a woman whose son had been missing for a week. Shortly after the ceremony began, the voice of a young man seemed to manifest through the shaman explaining that he was in good health and gave the location where he was camping. Two days later, the son arrived home; he confirmed that during the night of the session he had been asleep at the very location indicated through the shaman (p. 68).

Adrian Boshier, an amateur South African anthropologist who refused to take medication for his epileptic seizures, found that these seizures attracted the attention of the local natives who saw them as "signs" that he should become an apprentice for

extensive shamanic training. Telling a parapsychological conference about his apprenticeship in 1973, Boshier (1974) reported that he had visited one shaman who "threw the bones" during a shamanic ritual and told Boshier details about his past and future "that were absolutely correct."

Turner (1994) contributed a first-person observation of a "spirit" who appeared to take visible form during a shamanic ceremony in Zambia. Lyons (2012) has collected dozens of first-hand observations from North American tribal members, many of which involve shamans. One of these, the "shaking tent" ceremony can only be conducted by a shaman, was initially reported by a Father LeJeune in 1634, making it not only the first in-depth report of this ceremony but the first record of what was then referred to as Indian "conjuring" (Lyon, 2012, p. 225). Both male and female shamans have officiated when the designated tent begins to "shake," followed by reports of "spirit voices" and flying objects. The shaman is tightly bound or wrapped in a blanket before the ceremony begins but appears unbound at its cessation.

CRITIQUE

These observations are provocative and suggest directions that future research can take. By themselves, they are barely evidential because the reader does not know how to assess their veracity. An observer requires a background not only in conjuring but in critical analysis. Could the shamanic practitioner be eliciting information from

the observer that was later used in making a prediction or a statement about the observer's personal life? Nor does the reader know how many sessions observed by the writer produced material that was not accurate, how many dreams provided incorrect data? How many clients of the shaman did not obtain useful details about their lives and problems? Hyman (1977) has demonstrated how a performer can give a "cold reading" by using vague statements and sensory cues to construct a seemingly accurate description of a client. In many cases, the "hits" so impress the client he or she forgets or ignores the "misses".

The account of the "mist wolf" at the beginning of this essay was an observation attested to by a number of people and written up by one of them, Stephen Schwartz, years later. It is a fascinating report but would have been more impressive had it been recorded immediately after the ceremony ended. Also it lacks follow-up material in regard to the outcome of Rolling Thunder's ministrations on behalf of the two boys. Many remarkable recoveries last for a few days following which the participant, regrettably, returns to his or her original condition.

CONTROLLED OBSERVATIONS

Perhaps the first attempt to obtain controlled data regarding the anomalous abilities of shamans was initiated by Bogoras (1904-1909). Bogoras was an ethnologist who had heard many reports about "spirit

voices" that whistle and speak during Chuckchee ceremonies in Siberia. Bogoras attributed these phenomena to ventriloquism; he decided to record a session and obtained permission to observe a shaman famous for his ability to evoke "voices" from the spirits. Bogoras placed a recording funnel some distance from the shaman who sat in a stationary position during the demonstration, and who conducted the ceremony in almost total darkness. Several supposed spirit voices were heard. Soon Bogoras realized that the voices came from various points in the tent and not only from the area where the shaman was sitting. The distance effect also was apparent to people who heard the recording of the session, and Bogoras admitted that there was a marked difference between the voice of the shaman himself, who seemed to be speaking away from the funnel, and the spirit voices that seemed to be talking directly into the funnel. However, Bogoras never admitted that anything he had witnessed could have been anomalous; in his final report, published by the Museum of National History, he concluded that everything he observed was due to trickery, although he never explained how the voices could have been produced and manipulated.

Laubscher (1938), a South African psychiatrist, attempted to test the claims of Solomon Baba, a Tembu diviner. Unseen by anyone, Laubscher buried a small purse wrapped in brown paper, covered it with a flat stone, and placed a gray stone on the brown one. He then drove to the home of

Baba who lived 60 miles away. Shortly after Laubscher's arrival, Baba began to dance. He then accurately described the purse, the wrapping paper, and the stones. On another occasion, Baba described the appearance of some missing cattle from a distant region, and even predicted the exact day of Laubscher's forthcoming trip to England although the specified date was several months after the time for which the original passage had been booked.

When Boshier (1974) was working with a museum in Swaziland, he had an opportunity to test a local "witchdoctor" named Ndaleni in the company of another native practitioner and Boshier's friend, a "Miss Costello." The "target" item to be identified was the skin of a gemsbok, a South African antelope. Boshier recalls (paraphrased):

Leaving her in my office with the other witchdoctor and Miss Costello, I went to a neighboring building and took out the skin of a gemsbok. This I hid beneath a canvas sail on the back of my Landrover. Then I called her outside and told her I had hidden something that she must find. With the aid of the other witchdoctor, she knelt down and began to sing softly. Then, in a trance state, she informed me that I had hidden something across on the other side of that building over there. She told me that it had more than one color, that it came from an animal, and that it was raised up off the ground. Suddenly she got up,

ran around the building, out into the front where the Landrover stood and knelt down beside it. Again she began singing softly, and within five minutes of this she tore off one of her necklaces, and holding it in front of her as if it were a divining rod, she walked around the Landrover, climbed into the back and took out the skin. (p. 27)

CRITIQUE

Boshier's study was impressive but flawed; because he knew the identity of the "target" item, he may have passed nonverbal cues to Ndaleni who picked them up, consciously or unconsciously, just as a stage magician will locate an object hidden in the audience by observing the gestures and eye movements of the crowd. As for Laubscher's work, another person should have interviewed Solomon Baba. Laubscher knew the identity of the hidden object, and the reader of his report has no guarantee that Solomon Baba did not elicit clues from Laubscher during interactions that might have occurred before, during, or after the trance dance. As for Bogoras, his account is presumptive in concluding that ventriloquism was at work and in not providing an explanatory mechanism for the differences that he and others purportedly observed on the recording. Investigators who claim that fraud has occurred need to present a plausible scenario. They, too, should have a background in conjuring if they are to write knowledgeably about unusual phenomena.

Chari (1960) has provided a guide to sleight-of-hand effects that one must be on guard for, basing his report on his investigations of fakirs in India, while Wiseman and Morris (1995) have compiled an excellent set of guidelines for testing psychic claimants.

EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES

Rose (1956) conducted a series of telepathy and psychokinesis tests with Australian aborigines using specially designed cards and plastic dice, which were placed in a shaker and tossed on a table with the goal of having certain die faces appear uppermost. He obtained statistically significant results in several of his telepathy experiments; at above chance levels, subjects were able to guess the design on which Rose's wife was focusing, out of the subject's sight. Psychokinesis tests yielded chance results; Rose reported that the aborigines did not believe they could influence psychokinetic phenomena since that was a prerogative of the tribe's "clever men" (i.e., shamans). Two of these "clever men" were given telepathy tests but their scores were not significant; however, they were not tested for psychokinesis, their alleged forte.

Giesler (1986) conducted several studies, each carried out with a different group of Afro-Brazilian "shamanic cultists." In one study the participant was asked to describe the location where someone (an "out bouncer") had been taken -- one which was had been determined after the shaman and

the "out bouncer" had parted company. In another task, a glass of water, a white candle, and a spirit figure (taken from the Afro-Brazilian pantheon of deities) were displayed and the participant was asked to guess the order in which the three objects appeared in a hidden list. The results were suggestive but not conclusive.

In Garhwal, India, Saklani (1988) screened a number of shamans who claimed to incorporate various deities (e.g., "Muslim Pir", "Goddess Dhari"). One shaman, Yashoda Devi, was selected for parapsychological studies. Tests in which Devi attempted to match "token objects" with their "owners" yielded non-significant results as did an examination for psychokinetic effects on methanol. However, the height of plants from seeds was significantly greater in the group "treated" by being held by Devi, while she chanted, than in the control group which had not been held by her. A significant effect in the absorption of saline solution "treated" by the shaman was observed over a control concoction containing no saline. The growth of seeds sown in the field and "treated" by flasks of water previously held by Devi was somewhat more rapid on certain days of the study than that of control seeds given ordinary water. Saklani did not make it clear as to whether the person making the measurements was "blind" to the "treated" and control materials; even a fair-minded experimenter can inadvertently "tilt" the results if he or she knows which group repre-

sents the experimental condition and which group represents the control.

CRITIQUE

Giesler's and Saklani's work are among the few experimental parapsychological investigations to have been made of native practitioners who claim to have anomalous abilities. The results are neither compelling nor conclusive, but there were a few provocative results. In addition, their experimental designs, as well as their suggestions for improvements, might pave the way for future studies. Giesler (1984, p. 315), for example, has called for a "multi-method" approach that would (1) focus more attention on the psi-relevant contexts in native cultures; (2) combine ethnographic and experimental methodologies so that the strengths of one offset the weaknesses of the other; (3) incorporate a "psi-in-process" method into the field research design. Giesler proposed that with this approach, the researcher may study ostensible psi processes and their relationship with other variables in the contexts of shamanic rituals and practices such as divination, trance mediumship, and healing. This would allow for control of the conditions of a "psi task," and the results could be evaluated with a minimum of interference or disturbance of the psi-related activity.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS

For the shaman, there are no rigid boundaries between "waking life" and "dream life";

both are regarded as "real" but full admission to the latter "reality" usually depends on training and discipline. Malidoma Patrice Somé (1994, p. 233), an African Dagara shaman, remarked, "Nothing can be imagined that is not already there in the inner or outer worlds". Somé's autobiography is a phenomenological account of his preparation, initiation, and apprenticeship, often marked by presumptive psi phenomena. For example, Somé (1994) recalled that at a crucial period in his initiation, he was told to enter a cave. He recalled (paraphrased):

I went that way, jumping from rock to rock until I reached the entrance to the magical cave. The floor was sandy and dusty; I noticed with surprise that the walls were perfectly carved out of red granite. My fire went out. I closed my eyes in an effort to blot out images of what would happen if I had to back out. When I opened them again, I could see a light a little distance ahead of me. It grew bigger and bigger, and soon I realized that I had reached the other side of the mountain. Writing about what came next is an extremely difficult task. I saw a tree that distinguished itself from the others by its unusual size. Under the roots of the tree was a bluish-violet stone that glowed as I looked at it. It had a very bright center whose light increased and decreased, making the stone seem as if it were breathing. My hand had

taken on a violet color as if the irradiation of the stone were infectious. The violet was so powerful that I could clearly see it shining through the back of the hand stuck on top of it. Soon I felt as if I were in the middle of a huge violet egg that had no shell. Inside this egg there was a whole world, and I was in it. In that moment of awareness, I had an epiphany; the light we encounter on the road to death is where we belong. I could remember the entire experience I had just lived through, but it bore the aftertaste of a fantastic dream. Actually, I felt more like myself than I had ever felt before. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I saw a girl and found myself asking her for directions. She said, pointing west, 'You see those mountains over there? Go to the one in the middle, and cross to the other side of it. There is a cave there. That is your way home.' I found the cave the girl had told me about and ran in. It became dark as soon as I reached its interior. I could see the stony ceiling two or three feet above me. I had crossed back through the mountain almost instantaneously. Something bit me inside my hand. It was the blue stone, my only proof that what had happened had been real. (p. 244)

CRITIQUE

A phenomenological account is not evidential because it lacks the controls necessary to rule out prevarication, memory distortion, self-deception, and the like. However, there are very few accounts as graphic and as detailed as that offered by Somé. Obtaining a shaman's "inner" view of a potentially parapsychological experience is a unique opportunity that should be encouraged by future investigators.

IMPLICATIONS

"Magic" is a term used to describe a body of applied technology used to influence domains that a society believes are incalculable, uncertain, or unaccountable (Malinowski, 1954, pp. 139-140); if "magic" represents "natural" principles (e.g., conjuring, attribution, anomalous occurrences that--in principle--are lawful), it is amenable to parapsychological investigation (Winkelman, 1982). As the term is usually employed, human beings perform "magic" while so-called "supernatural" agencies (e.g., spirits, deities) perform "miracles." "Magical" practices and phenomena would be amenable to scientific study because, unlike "miracles," they follow "natural laws."

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE PHENOMENA

In his anthropological survey of unusual experiences among tribal people, Jensen (1963, p. 230) remarked, "there can be no doubt that man actually possesses such abilities," and left it open as to whether

these capacities are parapsychological or not. There are many alternative explanations such as suggestion, imagination, exaggerated reporting, or a temporary extension of one's sensory and motor skills under unusual circumstances (e.g., physical and emotional arousal, ingestion of mind-altering substances, high levels of motivation). Nonetheless, the literature demonstrates that anomalous phenomena may be linked to shamanic calling, to shamanic training, and to shamanic practice.

It is likely that many if not most accounts of shamans' anomalous behaviors and experiences have ordinary explanations. One's reputation becomes enhanced as tales are told and retold over the years, becoming embellished in the process. In addition, coincidence can be magnified by practitioners who point out the significance of an unexpected rainstorm, the sudden appearance of a "power animal," or an event that seems to conform to someone's dream of the previous night. It also must be recalled that in the shamanic worldview, one's imagination and dreams are as "real" as public events, and those who listen to a shaman's stories might not be able to separate the two.

In addition, shamans were the first magicians as well as the first healers. They realized the value of drama, of shock, and of surprise in mobilizing a client's self-healing capacities, and provided these elements through theatrical means. Murphy (1964), in her work among Eskimo shamans on Canada's St. Lawrence Island, discovered that

instructions in ventriloquism and legerdemain were part of shamanic training. Reichbart (1978) suggested that deliberate sleight-of-hand can be used by shamans to create a psychological environment conducive to the manifestation of genuine parapsychological phenomena.

Kelly and Locke (1982) suspected that parapsychological investigations in shamanic settings will become more fruitful to the degree that investigators succeed in penetrating sympathetically and in detail the interior of individual settings. A promising example was the work of Boshier among shamans in southern Africa, but his untimely death cut short these contributions. However, Van de Castle (1974, p. 281) was able to break through some of the customary reserve of Cuna Indian practitioners in Panama by bringing along a British sensitive who was so successful in demonstrating his skills in diagnosis and healing that villagers began requesting his services.

In regard to the scientific status of parapsychology, Irwin (1999) has taken a position that is frequently heard among contemporary parapsychologists:

The study of shamanism by behavioral and social scientists affords a unique opportunity to meet these goals. This opportunity has been bypassed for many decades, but the current interest in shamanism affords a chance for parapsychologists, with their unique training and perspective, to enlist anthropologists, psychologists, and other

scientists to join the investigation. Kane (2013) has lamented the constraints that Western culture has imposed on parapsychological studies, a perspective that "goes against the true purpose of science" (p. 46). Scientific research into the shamanism/parapsychology interface would extend the domain of science beyond these culturally-bound limitations.

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Capturing Spirituality: A Photo-Elicitation Study With Two British Neo-Pagans

Matt Coward



ABSTRACT

It was during the late nineteen-fifties that John Collier Jr first published a study which documented the use of photographs, taken by his research assistants, within his research interviews. Since then photo-elicitation has gone on to become a valuable part of the methodology of visual sociology. There have been many studies which have adopted the methodology of photo-elicitation. However there has been a distinct lack of research adopting this methodology, produced with regard to religious studies and an individual's distinct spiritual path. This study is a starting point for what I hope will bring about more substantial research utilising the methodology in the future. This study briefly documents the historical use of photo-elicitation; before moving on to two interviews with neo-Pagan practitioners; one of which an identifying Druid, the other a Pagan.

INTRODUCTION

The late Susan Sontag, the Dark Lady of American Letters, posited that photography "...is not practiced by most people as an art. It is mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety and a tool of power." (Sontag, 1973:5) Photographs have become something of a social rite, a way of stating 'I did this,' or 'I was there.' Photography as such a social rite is visible within a number of lucrative early photography businesses; such as the mortuary photographers who seated deceased relatives in 'lifelike' poses

with their families to capture a moment of unity when no other photo existed.

As a non-participant researcher I have always searched for a methodology that would reduce bias within qualitative research. An earlier project, which spawned the idea for this paper, used a qualitative questionnaire to ascertain the views of modern practicing Witches in York regarding their beliefs, ideas of history and their spiritual practices. With regard to this study my reasoning for shifting the paradigm is simple; as most of the participants from the previous study may have described them-

selves as a Witch or Wiccan, but also as a neo-Pagan. I concluded in this first paper that modern practicing Witches are able to “...engage, in their personal spiritual path that relies, partly, on both the ‘his-story’ and ‘her-stories’ of their predecessors and peers respectively” (Coward, 2014:19). Moreover it is this engagement with forging a personal spiritual path which thereby allows modern Witches, as a collective, “to create rhetoric of unity and communal identity...” (Coward, 2014:19).

With the paradigm shifted to focus on neo-Pagans, it is therefore the aim of this paper to explore the way in which neo-Pagan practitioners understand their own spirituality, through the use of photo-elicitation. The paper will firstly begin with a discussion of the methodology of photo-elicitation; citing and briefly exploring key photo-elicitation studies as well as the research design of the present study. The second section of this study will cover two in depth interviews with neo-Pagan practitioners. As a way of concluding this exploratory paper I will discuss the use of photo-elicitation within this context and the applications that photo-elicitation has with regard to the study of spirituality and ritual.

PHOTO-ELICITATION

Photo-elicitation has been used extensively within the fields of business, marketing and working with children but, has not been used at length within the study of religious practitioners. Photo-elicitation however has been used with regard to cultural studies in

which the researcher themselves documents the routine activity of the group in question (Harper, 2002:19). Douglas Harper (2002:13) remarks that photo-elicitation is, at its simplest form, the addition of photographs to an interview, which, in turn “evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words” (Harper, 2002:13).

It was John Collier Jr who used this technique with mental health patients in the 1950s, and who became the first scholar to publish on the technique of photo-elicitation. At the time the method was purely supplementary the research interview itself. For example Collier remarks that:

...the Stirling County Study indicated that photos were capable of reaching deeper centres of reaction, triggering spontaneous revelations of a highly-charged emotional nature. (Collier, 1957:858)

Unlike Collier’s study, in which the researchers themselves took the photographs for the participants to view, this study looks to ask the participants themselves to take the photographs. This process has been well documented by Elisa Bignante in her study of the Maasai in West Africa. Bignante concludes that the use of photo-elicitation can be seen as a supplementary method to a standard research interview but, moreover, that “photo-elicitation stimulates the informants’ ability to express their practical

knowledge through the attribution and association of meanings” (Bignante, 2010:15). More recent studies within various social scenarios have showed both the validity and success of photo-elicitation as a methodology. Thupayagale-Tshweneagae and Mokomane’s study with adolescents living with HIV in South Africa showed that photo-elicitation provided a prompt for the participant to discuss the meanings and impact they perceived within the photograph. Photo-elicitation constituted a therapeutic act for the participants involved, allowing them to; speak specifically and directly about their current needs (Thupayagale-Tshweneagae and Mokomane, 2013:94). Concurrently, Neil Jenkins et al’s study of military identity reported that the adoption of photo-elicitation reduced bias of participants responding to the researchers perceived expectations (Jenkins et al, 2008).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants at the beginning of this study were informed that I was looking to document the practices of modern Pagan practitioners, the only stipulation being that the participants had to be over the age of eighteen. I made initial contact with the participants through attending a Pagan social gathering, I had arranged with the organisers of this event that I would attend and they were aware of my presence. Due to my previous research in the field of

modern Witchcraft the group were already aware of me and so my presence at these events was not uncommon. Prior to the interview I asked both participants to take eight photographs that had personal resonance to them with regard to their spiritual practice; these photographs were then sent to myself and the interview was arranged.

The basic pattern of the interview was very simple; after greeting the participant and having a short chat I took out the printed copies of the eight photographs, and asked them to arrange them in order of relevance to their spiritual practice. Once the participant had completed the task I asked the participant only one further question: ‘Why?’ it was answering this question that took up the remainder of the interviews. With both interviews it was the case that the participant spoke at great length about their spiritual practices, being prompted by their own photographs to move forward with the discussion rather than by probes by the researcher. The remainder of the following paper explores the participants’ responses to the question alongside their photographs, where necessary. All participants are referred to purely by a pseudonym which has been randomly generated from *The Pagan Name Generator*.¹

LORI ANNWNN, A DRUID

It was a rather cold morning when I had arranged to meet Lori to conduct her photo-elicitation interview; prior to the in-

¹ www.fjordstone.com/fjo/generator.html

interview eight photographs were sent to me which were all taken by her. Lori was asked to rate the photos with regard to how much they impacted on her spiritual practice, they were as photographs of:

1. A sunrise, which is mirrored by the water
2. Hawthorne blossom
3. A composition of several ritual items which include; purple flowers; a large piece of quartz and a candle
4. A scruffy dog with big brown eyes, the background of the photograph is grass, it was taken whilst the dog was on a walk.
5. A piece of amethyst
6. A collection of white stones, of which runes are painted on to. They have been arranged on a piece of intricately decorated turquoise cloth.
7. A sunset, of which the sun casts what appears to be a path across the water. *Lori decided during the course of the interview that this photo would be more suited alongside 1.*
8. A tree cast in shadow. *Lori at the end of the interview decided that this photo would have been better suited between 1 and 2; we decided to call the photo 1a.*

‘As above, so below;’ (photo 1) Lori stated, this photograph shows the literal meeting point of the sky and earth, but it is more than that, it is the meeting of elements. Her personal practice as a Druid is a search for an internal divinity that cannot be completed within four walls; but with her ‘feet on the ground’ in the open. This sunrise (photo 1), only happens for a moment: she

describes it as ‘a liminal space where there can be reflection.’ But, ‘although one can reflect, one cannot stop,’ she remarked, as ‘perfect balance is perfect stagnation.’ The use of reflective practice is necessary to her spirituality; and that although taking a photograph of this momentary event it is important to remain in the present in the event and not become too focused on the process of taking photographs. Lori commented that this idea is matched with her photograph of the Hawthorne blossom (photo 2). Her reason for beginning to take photographs was to begin to map the changing of the seasons. Through walking her dog in the same place in each day she started to notice the passing of the sun, and therefore the changing of the seasons. Lori’s practices, as a Druid, mean that it is imperative to mark and accept change; rather than attempting to be tied to the same. She remarked that her spirituality ‘... is about the celebration of movement, [and] the celebration of change.’

Speaking about the celebration of change led Lori on to discuss how it was that she first became a practicing Pagan and when it was she first began to have ‘Pagan thoughts’- she recalled being driven home by her father from an outing at her grandparents. She looked out of the car window at the bare trees and almost instantly felt a pang of fear within her stomach wondering if the leaves would ever come back to the trees. Since then Lori had always felt a special connection to trees and considers herself to be a ‘tree hugger.’ Only recently,

Lori said, she was approached to assist someone starting out on the Druid path. She told them to ‘make friends with a tree,’ although, this might sound rather silly, she commented, she knew that:

‘By suggesting this that the individual would go out into the open and become more aware of the nature that they were surrounding themselves in; and they might therefore find life in what appears to be inanimate,’ which is much of what can be seen with the photograph.

Moving forward to the third photograph of ‘simple ritual’ Lori stated that currently a solitary practitioner; but that in the past she had worked with both large and small ritual groups. For Lori it seemed as though there was too much entertainment and not enough efficacy within these larger group rituals- and that although she does not object to light-hearted entertainment there must still be ritual intention. Lori then began to concentrate on the third photo. She narrated her thought process about the festivals that make up the wheel of the year for Pagan practitioners; she stated that some of these festivals, such as Lamas, did not particularly resonate with her and that she found during that time of year she was just too busy to partake in the festival. But, she remarked, ‘that is when I should stop and reflect.’ Lori found that the energies of what she termed the ‘dark festivals’ (e.g. Samhain, Yule, and Imbolc) resonated

greatly with her because of their links to the deceased and the importance that played within her practices. As scholars, including Graham Harvey have noted “at Samhain it is deemed particularly appropriate to invite the presence of the ancestors...” (Harvey, 2007:5)

The interview then moved back more directly to the photographs. Here Lori’s simple ritual is ‘the act of putting some flowers on the table and lighting a candle.’ She stated that, ‘it’s not how you do it [the ritual] but it is the reflection and the ritual intention that are important.’ As a Druid, Lori noted, she had even created ritual from simple actions, such as walking the dog, taking offerings to scatter in the hedgerows along the way; ‘I had the intention, and ’she noted, ‘... and I found that the ritual itself worked for me.’ Ritual can be as simple as a walk, which brought Lori back to the first photograph. She commented that when looking for signs from the universe that she walks in the open with ‘feet on the ground.’

The scruffy dog (photo 4) has ‘passed over to the other side,’ and has brought Lori back to Druidry when she might have strayed away. She states that ‘Pagans having to be considerate to other creatures,’ moreover, there was a strong thread of not only kindness to animals, but that individuals need to have more reverence and respect for the animal kingdom throughout the entire interview. Lori remarked that she was being a ‘bit indulgent’ including this picture of her dog. Lori noted that ‘Pagans

don't really loose people when they pass over, animals included': and she comments that this is why Samhain, in particular, has such resonance for her. It was here that Lori started to notice the interconnected nature of her photographs and posited that 'we've talked around all these photographs, but it's funny to find that they're all interconnected.'

In Lori's experience, crystal has a very large place in her life (photo 5). She finds that they have a communicative nature and it was these which brought Lori into Druidry. She looked then at her last photos and found that the messages they conveyed had all been discussed in different places. Lori then picked up the photograph of the runes (photo 6). As a working professional she provides tarot readings and psychic mediumship. But found that, having stepped on the journey to what she describes as 'self-mastery' has found people coming to her for advice, using her as a sounding board. Pagans, she remarked 'do have that extra bit of wisdom from looking inside.' She thinks that it's the stillness that brings people towards Pagans.

As a parting note she stated that 'Druidry cannot be extracted from what I do- it's that sense of perfect balance in the place of change. As Druids we keep moving, but manage to remain focused.' As a way of summing up the interview she commented that there seems to have been a great level of amalgamation between the photographs, which all, in some way, linked back to the first one; but, she commented 'if you'd

asked me to pick one photo to describe my spiritual practices, I don't think it would have been this one!'

BRIDGE ARIADNE, ONE WHO DOESN'T LIKE LABELS

Approximately two weeks after interviewing Lori I arranged an interview with Bridget. Prior to this interview I was sent eleven photographs (some of which were of the same theme) which we would talk about during the interview. They were as follows:

1. An image of a Pentagram
2. Three photos taken at a Beltane Festival
3. Two photos of the large stone circle at Avebury
4. A photo of an altar - on which are both Pagan and Jewish symbols
5. A quote which reads: "Thank G-oddess I'm Jewitch"
6. A photo of a menorah and a bottle of wine
7. A photo of a neckless with a quote from Philippians: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Ph 4:13).
8. Two photos of Buddhist meditation.

"You can't get a more basic, all round, symbol of Paganism than a Pentagram" (photo 1) Bridget remarked at the start of our interview. It's a symbol of positive healthy Paganism. Paganism, that is, with a capital 'P.' 'I don't know too much about it [the pentagram],' she remarked, 'but I understand it as the four elements combined with spirit.'

The particular pentagram that she chose for the interview held great significance for her as it was the logo of the Pagan collective she belonged to. This symbol is more than just about individual Paganism as a spiritual practice, reflecting social cohesion, a feeling of belonging and of social interconnection. For Bridget, Paganism ‘bridges the gaps’ in her life and she believes that she is a prime example of someone who picks and mixes spiritual practice to suit her current needs. She presented several themes: nature, spirituality, paranormal, and the supernatural- which, sometimes, people do not accept, but, to Bridget, ‘all those weird things seem to be completely logical... well, apart from astrology.’ Bridget describes herself as being as much Jewish and she is Pagan, and part of her practice is finding a way to balance the two.

The second set of photographs was from a Beltane festival that Bridget attended (photo 2). Beltane, as a festival, resonates greatly with her as it is a celebration of life whilst at the same time enjoying oneself as part of a larger community. It is intentional ritual practice whilst at the same time ‘having some fun.’ Her Pagan collective for example perform Mystery Plays at these events, usually retelling Celtic legend through modern humour and slapstick comedy, in the traditional styling of the York Mystery Plays. Bridget, though, questioned why it is that this festival resonated with her and if it was ‘genuinely spiritual’ or if she just enjoyed being amongst likeminded people. Either way

Bridget enjoyed being part of this festival, so much so, that she sought to include it within her photographs underlining her spiritual practice. The following photographs were taken at the stone circle in Avebury (photo 3), a place which Bridget feels an emotional connection and sentiment. She was quick to comment that she did not consider herself to be a medium as she did not feel any ‘energy’ connected with the place that other practitioners professed feeling; more that positive experiences had led to a positive connection with the place. Again here, for Bridget, it seems as though this place is inherently linked to her practices through the connection with the collective that she belongs to; again displaying her connection with group ritual activity.

It is this inherent spiritual interrogation that has led her to experience the practices of countless religions and spiritual practices. She notes that: “whilst I am on this intellectual quest I am still able to go and take part in all these events and spiritualities.” Moreover, though she persists in an ‘intellectual quest’ she also looks to “create her own truth” about a God, Goddess, or other higher power. Although classifying herself as a practicing New Age Pagan, she was born into what she describes as the Jewish ‘tribe.’ Her Jewish-ness, per se, has also impacted on her spiritual practices as a mode of attempting to connect to various spiritual practices. This is where she came across the practices of the Jewitch (photos 4&5); which combine the practices of Juda-

ism with that of neo-Paganism. With regard to this Bridget comments that: 'Whenever I [Bridget] meet other Jewish people, even Liberal ones, I still have more in common with Pagans.' It is her understanding that these Jewitch practices might aid her to reconnect with her 'neglected' Jewish practice. As they would act as a bridge between her overarching practices as a Pagan as well as her familial roots as a Jew.

Whilst Bridget was raised in a culturally Jewish family (photo 6), she is still developing what she terms her Jewish-ness. Her family did not practice Jewish ritual, though did encourage her to attend Jewish classes at the synagogue. Once she had decided that she no longer wished to attend her family did not force her to continue. Therefore she finds she is still learning what it is to be a 'Jew.' She comments that although 'I've never left Judaism, I've become in some way dissociated from it.' As part of Bridget's spiritual search she sought to involve herself with Buddhist practice (photo 8), in the form of a retreat led by a Tibetan Monk. Through the course of this retreat she questioned the nature of praising a 'God(dess)' but, moreover, the way in which these practices differed from the culturally Jewish practices she was brought up around and the Pagan festivals that she attended. 'To praise, or not to Praise?' she remarked. Everything in Bridget's journey related back to her personal spiritual quest, her search and exploration of differing spiritualities; and her connection with groups of likeminded individuals.

MOVING FORWARD WITH PHOTO-ELICITATION

There were great variations between these two photo-elicitation interviews which I will now deconstruct more fully. Firstly, both participants were given the exact same information regarding the style of the interview. There was, however, a very different response to the question. Lori, for example, practiced photography as a hobby and sent eight photographs that were taken by her. Bridget, on the other hand, sent eleven photographs, some of these being duplicates on the same theme and very few of the photographs being taken by her. What proves fascinating here is that both of these interviews provided rich qualitative data; in slightly different ways.

Lori is mainly a solitary practitioner, and none of her photographs involved a picture of another person. They were photographs of scenery, nature, and ritual implements. Bridget practices mainly with groups and her chosen pictures illustrate this. This is especially poignant considering her starting point of the pentagram, a photo which is also the symbol for the Pagan collective which she is part of. On the other hand Lori's starting photograph highlights her major overarching worldview and religious sentiment.

The chosen order of Lori's photographs demonstrated her practices in quite an ordered manner. The first four specifically dealt with the cyclic nature in which she perceives the world and her spirituality,

whereas the remaining four dealt with the delivery and the way in which the first four were practices. These two different areas of photography could be described as the interplay between *resonance* and *reverence*. Some of her photographs resonated with herself and her spirituality; and the others outlined how she gives reverence within her chosen spiritual practice.

Both participants commented that they found the use of photographs within interviews, within this case either taken by the participant or sourced by the participant as a positive and enjoyable experience. Lori commented that she liked the use of pictures and 'I [Lori] take such joy in taking photographs.' Bridget also found the use of photographs an interesting experience.

I feel that as an exploratory study these interviews have provided a lot of rich valuable information regarding individual approaches to neo-Pagan spirituality. Both interviews found the participants talking about their experiences with ritual and the way in which they enact their ritual whilst at the same time participants were able to posit their understandings about their various practices.

CONCLUSION

Photo-elicitation as a methodology has considerable scope in relation to researching both individual and communal religious practice. As Susan Sontag suggested the photograph has become something of a social rite; and this, in essence, can be understood as a positive in relation to photo-

elicitation. As a keen photographer Lori's photographs provided evoking scenes of personal ritual, and Lori's commentary on these provided even deeper analysis rather than just an aesthetic overview. This case was similar with regard to Bridget, but at times the use of photographs from the internet meant at times the interview learnt from the individual's approaches, to the more generalised understanding of religion and spirituality.

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Edwardian culture is filled with otherworldly encounters: from Rat and Mole's meeting with Pan on the riverbank in *Wind in the Willows* (1908), to Lionel Wallace's glimpse of an enchanted garden beyond the green door in H. G. Well's short story *The Door in the Wall* (1911). In art, Charles Conder's painted fans evoked an exotic arcadia, whilst the music of Edward Elgar and Frederick Delius conjured up nostalgic dreamlands.

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On the "Types" and Dynamics of Apparitional Hallucinations

S. Alexander Hardison



The term *hallucination* carries with it many connotations and associations. Some imagery that might spring to mind are persons resting securely at local asylums in straight jackets, or longhaired, overtly optimistic psychedelic users, with a bent for exploring their consciousness. But, without delving into the adventures of psychedelic investigators, or taking a trip into the local insane asylum, quite a large number of seemingly ordinary people, scattered amid the population, seem to have experienced visual, auditory and tactile experiences without the aid of any objective stimulus. More often than not, though not always, these particular forms of hallucination are related to real people, sometimes living and sometimes deceased.

To speak of apparitions, then, is to evoke other vague, but popular associations, like those of ghosts and spiritual beings. According to *An Introduction to Parapsychology* (Irwin & Watt, 2007, p. 192), apparitions are "encountered in a perceptual-like experience" and they relate to persons or animals that are "not physically present, with physical means of communication being ruled

out." As the authors make clear, the use of the word "apparition" does not necessarily promote any theory as to the source of the experiences, whether psychological, or more Spiritistic. They further elaborate that the apparitional experiences are different from other hallucinatory experiences in that they may contain "veridical information of which the experient previously was unaware; this generally is lacking in psychotic and drug-induced hallucinations of another person" (p. 193). Also, apparitions are usually clearly related to indentifiable people (or animals), while hallucinatory figures are "anonymous or known to be non-existent" the final large distinction is that apparitions are often perceived by multiple people, while "a psychotic or drug-related hallucination cannot be shared."

That inferred difference seems to stem from some of the speculations of G.N.M. Tyrrell (1963), one of the key writers on apparitional experiences in the 20th century (p. 126; p. 165). Now, this is a claim that does seem to support the idea that apparitions involve a separate class of phenomena than ordinary hallucinations and, if accepted, it could be seen as a striking fact in favor of

their paranormal nature. But, it can be argued, that the distinction exists as a *prima facie* objection to Tyrrell's theory of apparitions as telepathically formed idea-patterns

aside from the idea that the sample of material he was evaluating, being largely from the Report on the *Census of Hallucinations* (Sidgwick et. al, 1894), may have included an intrinsic bias against interpreting apparitions as anything but hallucinatory phenomena owing to the nature of the census question. Simply put, supporters of the telepathic theory of apparitions, which was developed to one of its most complex, apt and explanatory forms by Tyrrell, will have to explain why apparitional hallucinations should be collectively perceived while subjective ones should not be.

Tyrrell himself states, "I can suggest no reason why hypnotic and, indeed, purely subjective hallucinations also do not spread to bystanders, whereas telepathic hallucinations, in a certain proportion of cases, do. We are very much in the dark concerning the structure of human personality, which is probably far more extensive and complex than at present we have any idea of; and it may be that the telepathic process taps a factor in the personality which the hypnotic and subjective process leave untouched" (p.141). But, if subjective hallucinations can't be collectively perceived as the apparitional variety sometimes appear to be, it seems imperative to posit that hallucinations sparked by telepathic stimuli must, *de facto*, be interpreted as more "important" than other types of hallucination; that

would explain why the other relevant observers to the apparitional drama would get pulled into it.

If the supposed fact that apparitional hallucinations are collectively perceived while hallucinations of other varieties cannot be is accepted, then it is not impossible to explain that in terms of suggestion (at least in weaker cases). It may be that when a person sees a humanoid figure, hears a voice, or has any other sensory arousal in relation to an apparitional episode, it is collectively seen because it is more *relevant* to all the specators than, say, if the initial experient proclaims that he sees a pink elephant. But even that is not very probably applicable to some of the best cases of collective perception. Asserting that interaction at or around the time of the experience may make the subjects of the experience, unconsciously, more prone to suggestion is arguable but that explanation is somewhat speculative and it seems implausible as a reasonable contender in accounting for the high proportion of apparitional experiences that are collectively experienced when more than one person occupies the relevant space (one-third of the time).

However the above hypothesized distinction stands, apparitional phenomena are fairly stable and consistent, so it is clear that they aren't just unstructured hallucinations. And if the apparitional experience does intrinsically tap into an aspect of the personality that ordinary hallucinations leave untouched, or become collective because of the importance of the stimuli that

initiated any given group's perception, then any general theory of the phenomena will have to account for that feature—or explain how and why, if they are inseparable from ordinary hallucinations, they manifest in quite different forms.

In a June 2005 Gallup poll¹, 37% of Americans said they believed in haunted houses, with 32% saying they believed in the existence of ghosts. These beliefs tended to reach their peak in the 18-29 year-old age group and then decline slightly with age. "Ghosts", of course, support one interpretation of apparitional experiences—that of survival of consciousness—and, therefore, the actual rate of belief in genuine, external entities unrelated to living or deceased persons (i.e. Angels, demons, Marian apparitions, aliens, fairies) may be higher. Whether or no apparitions have any external reality, people do experience them

so much so that a substantial portion of the population report actual apparitional experiences: anywhere from 17-32% (Irwin & Watt, 2007, pp. 194-195). In any given case, most apparitional experiences involve only one or two sensory modalities and most are visual—84 percent, according to Green and McCreery (1975). Auditory experiences feature in about one-third of cases, with 14%, in that study, being entirely auditory. Contrast this with psychiatric patients, who report auditory hallucinations at a much higher frequency (Bentall, 2013, p. 115).

Regarding the so-called "taxonomy" of apparitions, Tyrrell (1963), suggested four

classes of apparitional experience: the experimental class, crisis-apparitional cases, the postmortem class, and the stereotypical "ghosts or hauntings cases." Regarding the first, it may be thought that cases of apparitions are nearly always spontaneous—but this isn't the case. There exist numerous anecdotes in the research literature, for example, of persons who have attempted, in some way or another, to make an apparition of themselves appear before a chosen person. Cases of alleged bilocation are an example of this, at least when the intent of projecting one's apparition, or "spirit" at the time that the double gets observed is demonstrated. Irwin and Watt (p. 195) list an example taken from *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney et al., 1886, Vol. 1, pp. 93-94), that of S. H. Beard. Upon opening *Phantasms* to the appropriate pages, the original account states:

"On Wednesday, 26th July 1882, at 10.30 p.m., I willed very strongly that Miss V., who was living at Clarence Road, Kew, should leave any part of that house in which she might happen to be at the time and that she should go into her bedroom and remove a portrait from her dressing-table.

"When I next saw her she told me that at this particular time and on this day, she felt strongly impelled to go up to her room and remove something from her dressing-table, but she was not sure which article to misplace. She

did so and removed an article, but not the framed portrait which I had thought of.

"Between the time of the occurrence of this fact and that of our next meeting, I received one or two letters, in which the matter is alluded to and my questions concerning it answered.

S. H. B."

The above is an example of what the authors came to describe as *telepathy* ("distant-feeling"), and it appears around the time the authors make a transition from the experimental research of the first few pages into spontaneous cases. One of the authors writes, "Mr. B. was himself at Southall on the evening in question. He has shown the letters of which he speaks to the present writer, and has allowed him to copy extracts." What makes this case interesting is that the referenced Miss Verity wrote to Mr. Beard without having spoken to him:

"On Thursday, July 27th, without having seen or had any communication with Mr. B., Miss Verity (now residing in Castellain Road, W., who allows the publication of her name) wrote to him as follows:

'What were you doing between ten and eleven o'clock on Wednesday evening? If you make me so restless, I shall begin to be afraid of you. I posi-

tively *could not* stay in the dining-room, and I believe you meant me to be upstairs, and to move something on my dressing-table. I want to see if you know what it was. At any rate, I am *sure* you were thinking about me.'

This is not one of the best examples of alleged telepathic-influence in the book, since no corroboratory testimony is given that Mr. Beard was attempting such an experiment at the time; he may have simply exaggerated in response to Miss Verity's letter and its status as an "apparitional experience" might be questioned because of the lack of any sense-perception, aside from the conviction the woman felt. However, *Phantasms of the Living* is quite possibly the cornerstone of research into apparitional hallucinations ("phantasm" is simply another word for "hallucination") and it is a monumental testament to the efforts of the Society for Psychical Research² in the Victorian era. Since the book was primarily concerned with apparitional experiences occurring at/or near the time of death, or intense tragedy, it will also lead into our next category of experience.

As suggested in a fairly recent *Paranthropology* article by this author (Hardison, 2013, p. 63), apparitions of the crisis variety "can be defined as vivid hallucinations of seemingly objective figures, witnessed in times of crisis. More often than not, they correspond to actual veridical events. A woman might awaken in the middle of the night to find that her husband is standing

in her bed-room smiling at her, even though she knows he is fighting in a war thousands of miles away." The apparition fades and she "inevitably finds that her husband did, in-fact, die unexpectedly at the same time she saw his apparition."

In the article, it is clearly noted that the above story "is a fabrication", but it certainly does reflect a genuine category of experiences. *Phantasms* is filled with such accounts and pioneering work into interviewing techniques was undertaken by the Society in it and, much later, with the SPR's *Census of Hallucinations* (1894). In crisis cases, rather than evoking the concept of disembodied minds to explain the phenomena, Gurney and the other writers thought that they represented cases of telepathy in action—especially since not all cases involved people who actually died and, even in cases where severe illness was present, the persons sometimes recovered. To explain cases where the same figure was seen by multiple people, Gurney (and his skeptical SPR colleague, Frank Podmore) would suggest that a form of telepathic *infection* was occurring, with one initial message being sent to one mind and then passed along to others in close spatial proximity.

Frederic Myers, another founder member of the SPR and an assisting writer of the book, later came to disagree, thinking that even though apparitions of the living (and dead) could be hallucinatory projections inspired by telepathic stimuli, it would be difficult for them to account for

the consistency of the experient's perspectives using the infection hypothesis: he thought that they'd best be explained by actual disembodied minds, from what he called the *metetherial world*, somehow projecting themselves into the physical layer of reality. Myers also seemed to imply that all apparitional encounters might not involve the same "underlying process" (Irwin & Watt, 2007, p. 203). Further, Myers' theory, and others that suggest that apparitions may involve a quasi-physical element, are not subject to the minor issue outlined earlier in relation to Tyrrell's theory; if an apparition occupies physical space in some way, we can be reasonably sure that subjective hallucinations do not and, therefore, the distinction between the two types of experience is explained. Because Tyrrell's theory is probably the most comprehensive and well-developed, it should be noted that he highlighted some of the problems of Myers' theory and those like it, chiefly in that it is oxymoronic to suppose that physical space contains a non-physical element (pp. 50-53). Additionally, since the apparitions are sometimes collectively observed, but *not always by everyone present*, it is more plausible to argue for some sort of intricate hallucinatory theory.

Moving on to the postmortem class of apparition, they involve the experience of persons who have been dead for at least 12 hours. About two-thirds of recognized apparitions, in any instance, are of the dead (Green & McCreery, 1975, p. 188; Haraldsson, 1985, 1994; Persinger, 1974, p. 150). As

an example of a postmortem experience, a person experience of this author will be mentioned. The experience was written down shortly after it occurred and memory issues are not likely to have occurred though there are no obvious veridical details, so the evidence for paranormality is absent. Of primary concern, however, is the phenomenology and experiences of apparitions themselves, not only those cases that strictly contain veridical content, or those of the crisis variety (which wouldn't grant a full-analysis of apparitional experience, but can suggest anomalous cognitive input in and of themselves).

To paraphrase, it was September of 2009 and the author was awakened early in the morning, before anyone in his home. A noise had caused this—a popping sound made from a release of pressure on the metal bedpost behind the author's head. The author had been sleeping on his side and belly, toward the wall, but felt someone sitting on the bed to the right (near the foot of the bed); there had been plastic surrounding the mattress, at that time, and as the person moved to get up, the plastic was heard to move, the bed seemed to respond with the sensation of movement, and then the author turned to his right. Before enough courage was mustered to turn and see the figure, flashes of thoughts entered his mind: Could it have been a burglar? Perhaps it was his younger brother watching him sleep (which would have been very strange).

The author managed to see the figure as he stood all the way up and walked toward the wall (the door to the room was closed); it was his grandfather, a man who'd passed away in 2003 of a cancerous condition. He was as solid and three-dimensional as anyone the author had ever seen and he faded away after a few split seconds (seeming to vanish before getting to the wall). Upon getting out of bed, the author walked out of the room to see everyone sound asleep the sun just setting in. His younger brother was asleep on the floor and others in the house were, likewise, in their beds.

In comparing this experience to others, it was spontaneous, a predominant feature in the apparitional literature. It was also solid (rather than stereotypically transparent), nearby (according to Green & McCreery, most apparitions are experienced within 10ft of the subject), appeared at a time when the author was waking from sleep (hypnopompia; these experiences are common in both that state and in hypnagogia), he knew the person was dead at the time—70% of apparitions fall into that category (Green & McCreery, 1975, p. 188; Haraldsson, 1985)—and, finally, the apparition of his grandfather showed an awareness of his surroundings; there was even perceived interaction. As Nicola Holt et al. Note (2012), "theories of apparitions must account for the unified nature of the perceptual field (room + apparition) and not merely a figure in isolation." (p. 129)

The final category of apparition listed by Tyrrell are the classical conceptions of

ghosts/or hauntings. It may be moot to describe some of the features in these cases, as the general population is already so aware of them, but in the haunting class, apparitions typically aren't nearly as interactive, they seem localized to specific places, and they also seem to create disturbances in their immediate physical environment.

If a theory of apparitions cannot fully account for all of the features thus-far listed, then it is at best wholly incomplete. Numerous attempts have been made to explain the experiences from various perspectives, including the psychological, spiritualistic, parapsychological, sociocultural, neuropsychological and environmental (Irwin & Watt, 2007; Holt, N. et al., 2012). There are certainly physical correlations amid surveys of apparitional experiences, as well as psychological — there seem to be few demographic variables associated with the experiences, though.

Among the physical characteristics, the experiences typically seem to occur in regular, everyday home environments (12 percent occurring in places the subject never visited, according to Green & McCreery, 1975, p. 123). Additionally, the experiences usually happen unexpectedly and indoors. Psychologically, most people who experience apparitions claimed to "have been in normal health" at the time of their experience and, thereby, not mentally or physically ill. Still, most apparitions seem to be experienced when the experiencer is inactive, such as when going to sleep, or coming out

of it — this, again, brings up hypnopompia and hypnagogia, though being prone to mental "absorption" in any given situation might facilitate the encounters. Many psychological correlations between the experiences are not yet entirely clear (Irwin & Watt, 2007, pp. 199-201).

Neurological (or Biological) approaches also seem to be lacking, in many respects. Michael Persinger, a Canadian scientist famous for his "God-helmet", "has argued that apparitions, or their more rudimentary form, the 'sense of presence' may be explained neurologically." His idea is that most people are right-handed, and that their sense of "self" is localized in the left hemisphere of the brain. The 'homologue' of the sense of self might be interpreted as another human (or "entity") by the left hemisphere. This, it is argued, might occur more frequently in times of intense tiredness or stress.

Persinger attempted to stimulate the area of the brain thought to be responsible for the representation of the sense of self, typically in the right temporal lobes, with a magnetic pulse. Afterward, researchers typically "expose both hemispheres of the brain to a different pulse - designed to encourage the intrusion of right hemispheric representation into the left hemisphere (which is thought to *interpret* the experience)." People in this setup have reported senses of presence and even hallucinatory phenomena, leading Persinger to suggest that some haunting-type phenomena may result from the activation of the right tem-

poral lobe, or the parietal lobes and other areas in the limbic system.

Holt et. al (2012), point out that the only replications that have been undertaken come from Persinger's lab, without independent replications (and one failed one; see Granqvist et al., 2005). Suggestion may have played a role in Persinger's positive findings, particularly if the subjects knew what the magnetic stimulation was supposed to bring about beforehand; additionally, the areas of the brain which are stimulated are also associated with memory and if the subjects had prior apparitional experiences (as one subject did; he reported a positive experience in Persinger's lab, similar to his initial one) then perhaps such stimulation is only triggering the *memories* of the initial encounters. Thus, at least in its current incarnation, Persinger's theory seems lacking in sufficient empirical support.

To draw to some form of conclusion, environmental factors have also been proposed, but these are most applicable to cases of hauntings and don't sufficiently explain the full spectrum of apparitional experience. These factors might include lighting, or variations in electromagnetic fields at given locations, two things which can facilitate abnormal experiences (Wiseman et. al, 2002). There have also been suggestions that infrasound (sound that cannot be perceived, at around 19 HZ), might explain the high occurrence of apparitions in allegedly haunted locations (Tandy, 2000; Tandy & Lawrence, 1998). In a more recent

study by French et. al (2009), researchers attempted to see whether more anomalous experiences were reported in a location with complex electromagnetic fields, infrasound, or a combination thereof, as compared to an ordinary, baseline, constructed 'haunted room'. The experimenters received some reports of anomalous experiences in the faux-haunted room, but these were taken as products of suggestion not environmental influence (the participants were informed that they might have strange and unusual perceptions while in the chamber).

Whatever the causes of apparitional phenomena may or may not be, they deserve attention for one thing, they are profound and life-changing experiences for a good number of ordinary people in the population. Charles Ollier once said (1848), "It may be laid down as a general maxim, that anyone who thinks he has seen a ghost, may take the vision as a symptom that his bodily health is deranged. Let him, therefore, seek medical advice, and, ten to one, the spectre will no more haunt him. To see a ghost, is, *ipso facto*, to be a subject for the physician" (p. 10). Ollier made that statement before the rising-tide of Spiritualism ever rushed into Victorian society and certainly before the onslaught of Darwinism lead the founders of the Society for Psychical Research to embark on their sober quest of sorting through the nonsense of religion and the occult in the hope which has proven somewhat futile- of finding that Man has an element within him

that is transcendent and even immortal. But, since that day and age, we've found that experiencing apparitions is really just an aspect of the human condition that occurs in ordinary people during hypnagogia, in non-exotic, "ordinary" awareness though there may nearly always be some fluctuating degree of dissociation present and even during bereavement (Bell, 2008). In light of this, "Why, then, has this aspect of human experience been marginalized?" is an acceptable retort.

Single, monistic approaches to this subject will clearly not be comprehensive, as has been made clear; rather, pluralistic and multi-disciplinary approaches should be the norm. Tyrrell (1963) dealt with the philosophical and perceptual implications of apparitional experience, which is essential reading for any student of representationism, or general perception (pp. 91-108; pp. 172-178); McCreery (2006) continued in that tradition with a more modern and generalized analysis of hallucinations and their implications for perception. Perhaps with continued effort, aided by more intellectual scrutiny and debate, we will understand more about the variables involved in the experiences themselves. Looking for resolution and closure on the "ghost question" is an open-ended pursuit. Apparitional experiences embody elements of mystery, intrigue, reassurance and mortality looking to them for meaning and psychological insight, in turn, can help us better face our own haunted existence.

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I'm a psychology student who is very interested in the beliefs surrounding "extraordinary" experiences: both their formation and their maintenance. Additionally, I'm interested in the history of psychology and parapsychology,

which to some degree, are inseparably intertwined. Dissociation and extreme phenomena associated with dissociative states of consciousness are of profound interest to me. I think that future inquiries into those sorts of phenomena (and experiences) will lead research into that which is sometimes considered anomalous toward a bright, revealing future.

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Interview: W. Paul Reeve & Michael Scott Van Wagenen on the Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore

John W. Morehead



Mormon studies has encompassed various facets in order understand the complexity of Mormon history, narrative, and culture. Folklore is one aspect of specialization in Mormon studies, but Reeve and Van Wagenen's volume is unique in that it explores stories of the paranormal and supernatural found within Mormon folklore. In this interview the authors discuss the background to the book and what the reader will find inside.

In your book you take a folklore approach to the study of Mormon culture. Can you discuss how you came to focus on the monstrous and perhaps even paranormal aspects of your folklore studies?

Michael Van Wagenen: My interest in folklore actually began with Catholicism. Early in my career I was a documentary filmmaker who worked primarily in Latin America and the American Southwest. I have spent most of my life near the US-Mexican border and was particularly fascinated by the folk religion and healing practices of this region. Much of my early film work reflects this interest. When I moved to Utah to pursue my Ph.D., I became equally

captivated by the folk practices of the Latter-day Saints. Basically I was shifting my focus on one group's encounters with the unexplained to another's. Personally I think the subject resonates with Paul and me as we are part of that generation of 1970s and 80s American youth that were surrounded by tales of the supernatural and paranormal. All of our contributors grew up with the stories of UFOs, Bigfoot, Loch Ness Monster, and other unexplained phenomena. We were also raised as Mormons, so we were familiar with the unique Latter-day Saint interpretations of these wonders. There was also a spirit of fun and playfulness in doing this work. How often do we historians get to dabble in the magical realms of our youth?

What is the relationship between official Mormon teaching and cosmology from the General Authorities of the LDS Church and unofficial folklore supernaturalism?

Paul Reeve: The point that we make in the book is that it is a negotiation and navigation that is ongoing and constantly in flux. That is the nature of folklore in general. In

the Mormon example we explore ways in which a vast Mormon cosmology offers opportunities for Mormons in the pew to fill in the gaps in terms of what is knowable. Most of the examples in the book offer evidence of a top down phenomenon wherein leaders articulate a position or teaching and then local Mormons use that teaching to shape a folk belief to fit their particular circumstances. Michael Van Wagenen's UFO essay, however, explores ways in which the direction was also sometimes reversed, from the pews to the pulpit. The UFO movement of the 1970s was particularly strong in the intermountain West, a region with large percentages of Mormons, and some of the excitement manifested itself in official LDS magazines as well as in a "General Conference" talk from a leading Mormon who coopted the language surrounding UFO culture and applied it to LDS theology. That talk likely then created additional space within which Mormons in the pew could fashion new folktales and begin the legend process anew.

What place do such stories play in lives of Mormons in the space between what you call "pulpit and pew"?

Michael Van Wagenen: The world is clearly full of mysteries. There is also something innate within our species that drives many of us to explore the unknown. For the religiously inclined, church is the obvious place to search for answers for all of life's great mysteries. Ultimately religion fails to satisfy all the unknowns, leaving the inquisitive to Vol. 6 No. 1



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conjecture on their own. The space between pulpit and pew is therefore the gap between official doctrine and the folk beliefs of the people. It exists to restrain the speculation of Mormons while informing the leadership of the intellectual needs of the faithful. As you find in the book, it is a fascinating space rife with creativity, knowl-

edge, and superstition. For the Latter-day Saints, it is a fertile ground that fills in the gaps left in our unique cosmology. Having answers, regardless of how tenuous, brings order to an otherwise frightening and chaotic world. For devout Mormons I believe it also confirms their central place in God's plan for humankind which gives them strength and purpose.

The essays in your book present unique Mormon perspectives on various aspects of the paranormal such as Bigfoot, UFOs, and even a Mormon version of the Loch Ness Monster. Can you summarize the Mormon versions of these and discuss how Mormon cosmology shapes the narratives along the way?

Michael Van Wagenen: The interesting thing we discovered about the Latter-day Saint fascination with UFOs and modern-day monsters is that it predates the popularization of these phenomena in the mid-twentieth century. Prominent members of the church began witnessing these things as far back as the early 1830s. This allowed the Mormon interpretation to evolve somewhat independently of popular culture. Without giving too much away, I will say that Bigfoot was believed to be Cain - wandering the earth after being cursed by God for slaying his brother Abel. UFOs were originally believed to be signs of the Second Coming of Jesus. When Mormons in the Intermountain West began having close encounters during the 1950s, the interpretation of UFOs evolved to become evidence

of life on other planets, a formerly obscure doctrine that moved to the front and center of Mormon imagination for a few decades. The Mormon "Nessie" was a nineteenth-century hoax that was born of our culture's characteristically odd sense of humor. All of these fit neatly within the church's cosmology which includes an ever-expanding universe populated by gods, angels, humans, and monsters.

Another essay discusses Mormon concepts of demonic possessions. How are these different from the more commonly expressed forms of Catholicism and Protestantism in the development of ideas about evil spirits?

Paul Reeve: The Mormon demonic possessions discussed in one essay are from the nineteenth century and are geographically concentrated at Hebron, Utah, a small Mormon ranching community in the southwestern corner of the state. They include local Mormon leaders using priesthood blessings in an effort to cast out the demons as well as fasting and prayer. The major difference from Catholic or Protestant examples is that the demonic possessions in this particular community become linked to Mormon specific folklore tied to the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon describes a nefarious band of thieves and murderers named the Gadianton Robbers who plunder and attempt to destroy Christian believers. A folk legend developed at Hebron that settlers must have founded their community on an ancient Gadianton Robber burial ground and that the spirits

of those ancient robbers still haunted the country and may have accounted for the rash of demonic possessions that plagued the town.

Why is a study of Mormon history and culture incomplete without consideration of this aspect of their folklore?

Paul Reeve: Mormon history and culture includes a variety of things: events, people, places, an unfolding theology, interaction with broader society, material objects, and so forth. Belief in the supernatural is a part of Mormon history and culture and so to fully understand how and why Mormons responded to events and surrounding society one needs to take folklore seriously. As historians we attempt to situate the folklore that we study within the various historical contexts that gave it life and pay attention to change or continuity over time. We believe that the lore itself brings us close to the hearts and minds of the people we study and offers unique lenses into a variety of Mormon worldviews.

What were some of the takeaways you and your contributors came to in regards to what these folk tales "tell us about the faith, values, attitudes and fears of the Latter-day Saints and their neighbors" as you say in the Introduction?

Michael Van Wagenen: Taken out of context, our study of the supernatural world of Mormonism would further brand the faith as strange and foreign. What we found, and what we hope that our readers will take

away is an understanding that Latter-day Saint encounters with the supernatural are fairly universal. Ultimately we trust that this book highlights what is unique about the Mormon experience while contextualizing it within the wider human experience.



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Paranthropology

